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ABSTRACT

Presented in case study format, this report looks at different types of workplace literacy programs across Canada. It describes in some detail 10 particular work environments and the unique characteristics that have enabled each to offer quality worker education programs. Each case study provides information in these categories: profile (an abstract of the program), company background, human resources policy, program description, services and training delivered, decision making about the program, program impacts, barriers to implementation, policy influences, innovative program features, and advice to others. The following programs are described: Workplace Language Program, University of British Columbia; Workers' Education for Skills Training Program, City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch; A Workplace Learning Centre, The Calgary Herald; Workplace Education Program, Northwoodcare, A Halifax Nursing Care Facility; Learning Initiatives for Tomorrow, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro; Workplace Education Program, Intertape Polymer Inc., Truro, Nova Scotia; Workers' Education Training Program, Atlas Graham Industries Co. Ltd.; Roofers' Educational Skills Training Program, Alberta Roofing Contractors Association; Workplace Education Program, Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd.; and Basic Education for Skills Training Program, Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm Region. The report concludes with a comparative section outlining some lessons to inform practice in the field. (YLB)

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ED 387 595

Workplace Basic Skills

A Study of 10 Canadian Programs

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Partnerships in Learning
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July 1995

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Workplace Basic Skills

A Study of 10 Canadian Programs

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A special appreciation and acknowledgement to Brigid Hayes, National Literacy Secretariat for her advice and expertise throughout the duration of the project. As well, the advisory team would like to express its gratitude to the many partners who were committed and dedicated to making this report happen — Linda Calahan, Martine Clément, Aline Demers, Bill Grant, Terry Lapointe, Conrad Murphy, Elizabeth Orton, Darcy Rhyno, Julie Salembier, Dave Siermachesky, Mary Taylor, Paul Temple, Angela Tessier, and Tina Woods.

What's this report all about?

It's about people trying to better themselves at their jobs. It's about employees and employers making changes at the workplace. It's about basic skills training.

This report looks at 10 different workplace literacy programs across the country. In case study format, the report describes in some detail a number of work environments and the unique characteristics that have enabled it to offer a quality worker education program. This document represents the actual voices of the program participants — from top manager to front line workers, from program instructors to shop floor supervisors.

The reader will find 10 different stories of how employers and employees have developed and sustained workplace training. As well, there is a section which describes some of the lessons that can be learned from these case studies to inform our practice.

What makes a workplace program innovative? Our paticipants have said it's a combination of program flexibility, a committed management, a co-operative team, quality instructors, a positive psychological classroom environment and an employee centred program focus.

What were the most common barriers experienced in setting up the workplace programs? Our participants clearly stated that they were program costs, location, unexpected delays, lack of company infrastructure, difficulty enrolling the first students and company apprehension.

What advice can be given to others planning to implement a program? Our participants have these suggestions to offer: access available community resources, develop partnership funding, make the program voluntary, complete a needs assessment and develop a multi level planning committee.

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Introduction

In this last decade, the Canadian workplace has evolved into a far more diverse and demanding environment. Out of necessity, companies have had to be flexible and more competitive by getting their fixed costs down. Common ways of doing this seem to be through downsizing, cutting out management layers and outsourcing certain functions.

These kinds of measures have been a result of many factors. One of the most important ones, though, involves the growth of the information economy. "Grey matter" or mind oriented work is becoming much more important, while repetitive labour intensive activities have become less important. In the meantime, however, there is a workforce who is untrained to take on these particular jobs.

As factories shift to a new type of paper chase and small and medium sized companies talk about implementing a learning oraganization, a re-examination of how Canadian business and industry prepare and maintain the basic skills of it's workforce is underway. Some corporations have chosen to go to the source of the problem. They have "adopted" schools and by working with principals, they create programs that better prepare the pool of students from which they must choose their future employees.

Others have chosen to seek more immediate solutions by establishing in-house workplace training programs to help improve the basic skills of the present labour force. This report is about those companies. *Workplace basis skills training: A study of 10 Canadian programs* is a document which looks at different types of workplace literacy programs across the country. Presented in case study format, it describes how employers and employees have developed and sustained workplace training.

Designed after the 1993 report *Narrowing the Skills Gap: Workplace literacy programs,* this document describes in some detail 10 particular work environments and the unique characteristics that have enabled it to offer a quality worker education program.

The project, which started last September, was designed around three phases: workplace program selection, interviews with the different program participants and case study drafting and verification. Through the assistance of an advisory committee 10 programs were identified based on the following criteria: region, program innovativeness, program leadership, program accountability and program longevity.

Once the programs were selected, field researchers in each of the regions interviewed the different stakeholders using standard interview schedules. For each program, the interviewees consisted of a company human resource, a company supervisor, a union representative, a workplace program co-ordinator, an instructor and a focus group of employees. Following these consultations, field notes were written, case studies were developed and the information verified by interviewees.

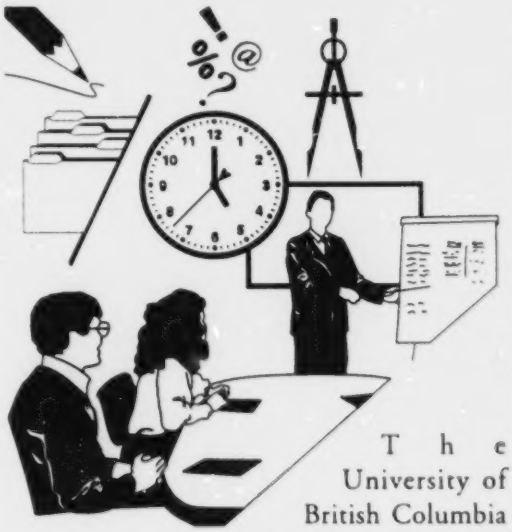
The reader will find in each case study, information written under the following categories: Profile, (which is an abstract of the program), Company Background, Human Resources Policy, Program Description, Services and Training Delivered, Decision Making About the Program, Program Impacts, Barriers to Implementation, Policy Influences, Innovative Program Features and Advise to Others. The report concludes with a comparative section outlining some of the lessons that can inform our practice in the field.

The University of British Columbia

Workplace Language Program

The University of British Columbia

Workplace Language Program



The University of British Columbia is a non-profit, publicly-supported organization which was established in 1915. In response to some of the technological and organizational changes they experienced, the university was taxed with an increasing demand for both stronger technical skills and sharper basic skills, such as reading, writing and oral communication among their employees.

The workplace language program has been in place for almost two years. It was customized to meet the specific needs of the employees at the university and is administered by a standing committee, a training coordinator and a training section who liaise with the Hastings Institute — the delivery agency. The teaching methods are interactive, group-oriented and experiential. Reading, writing and numeracy skills are taught, as well as listening and speaking skills. The classes meet twice a week, day or evening, from two to four hours. The program has shifted from mostly custodial staff, to a more eclectic representation of the whole university community.

The workplace language program evolved due to concerns for higher quality service, increased health and safety practices and changes in the available workforce. Changing labour and management relations and a commitment to build cross-cultural learning and integration were also key factors in the decision to implement the program. The impacts of the program are dynamic in nature. There is a clear indication that the ability of the workers to read, communicate, learn new technologies and problem solve has all increased substantially since the program began.

Barriers around the novelty of launching a workplace language program, as well as cost and scheduling issues were of particular concern during the implementation stage. There were also some personal barriers experienced by some of the participants such as time release problems, family conflicts and the embarrassment of revealing that they had a literacy-related problem.

There were several highly creative features of this workplace language program. The first of these was the casual, relaxed, non-threatening environment in which the learning took place. The second was the flexibility of the program and the third feature was related to the thorough background research that was done by the committee on the various types of service providers.

To further encourage others to consider implementing a workplace program, the following reflects some of the thoughtful advice that participants have to offer: include employees in all the planning discussions, take time to plan the design, secure funding, develop partnerships and know the employees' needs.

The University of British Columbia

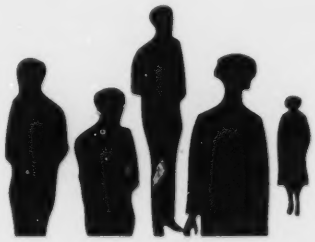
Workplace Language Program

Company Background

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is a non-profit, publicly supported university which was established in 1915. It employs more than 10,000 employees from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The employees are approximately 50% women and 50% men with the average age being 41.

As with most universities the largest proportion of the workforce is made up of faculty followed by technical personnel. Clerical support, management, professionals and labourers contribute to a smaller segment of the workforce. The remaining 5% of the labour force is custodial and food services employees. Ninety percent of food services workers are employed seasonally and 50% of custodial workers are part-time. Most of these employees have been represented by a union including different locals of CUPE beginning in 1946. Management and professionals are excluded staff.

One of the foreseen changes for the university is the reduction in the size of its workforce.



These cut-backs and diminishing resources will increase the need for more internal promotions and in-house training, to help compensate for the unstable economic times.

Human Resources Policy

The University of British Columbia hasn't downsized their organization over the past 5 years and their turnover rate remains as low as 0-10%. Although it does not have a policy which defines a career ladder within the organization other than performance above seniority, or a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement, the company does give, within the union context, priority to current employees when jobs above entry level become available. On occasion, training follows these promotions, or promotions follow the training. However, there are still some employees whose skills are too low to make them promotable.

In terms of wages, UBC management earns about 80% of what a private sector manager would earn. Custodial workers earn a similar wage to Vancouver Regional District employees as in the City of Victoria and City of Vancouver. Private sector custodial workers earn minimum wages to about $8.00 per hour. Also, UBC clerical workers at step 1 in the pay scale earn about $1.35 per hour more than a City of Vancouver clerk. With regards to sick leave, vacation pay and lenience towards lateness, the organization is more generous than other employers of the same size. They also offer a wide range of fringe benefits such as: health, life and disability insurance, pensions, vacation pay, parental leave and tuition reimbursement.

The shortage of skills that the program has responded to ranges from new technology and changes in the organization of work, to problems within the educational system itself.

All of these factors have contributed to the increasing demand for both stronger technical skills and sharper communication skills, such as reading, writing and oral communication. The decision to upgrade basic skill levels was directly related to these two demands. It has also become increasingly important to be a team player and a good problem solver. In terms of human resource issues, the management have identified several internal difficulties such as absenteeism and lateness, labour costs, productivity, employee morale and worker/management relations.

One of the strategies that the University has employed to address these issues has been to enhance the appeal of the internal jobs by making them more accessible. They do this through their use of training programs.

Program Description

The Workplace Language Program has been operating for the two years at the University of British Columbia. It is an original program that

was entirely customized to meet the specific needs of the employees at the University.

It is administered by a standing committee, a training co-ordinator and a training section, who liaise with the Hastings Institute. This standing committee is made up of a resource manager, an internal consultant, union representatives, an employee representative and trainee representatives. They are all collectively responsible for administering the literacy and basic skills program. There is ongoing liaison between the program participants and the training co-ordinator. All of the services are delivered by an outside training institute.

The program is not viewed as a fringe benefit by management. The University offers several different support services to assist those employees participating in training programs.

There is a tuition reimbursement plan, tutoring and counselling support services. However, these support services do not apply to this basic skills program. Although wages are not raised as a

guaranteed result of completing the program, it does increase the employees chance of promotion.

Services and Training Delivered

The teaching methods used to deliver the program are group oriented, interactive and sometimes experiential. Reading, writing and numeracy skills are taught, as well as listening and speaking skills. The classes meet Monday to Thursday, either during the work day, or in the evenings from 2 to 4 hours. The course is 18 weeks long and the learners meet on both company and employee time, at the worksite. Participation is voluntary.

Over 120 people have participated in the program since it's inception.

Approximately 35 people are currently in the program and 40-50 people typically participate in each term or cycle. The teacher/student ratio is 1-5. The participants vary greatly, in both their ethnic and educational backgrounds with people of Asian, northern and central European and Hispanic descent being the two largest groups to participate in the training, followed by those of Slavic and eastern European descent. Some students have secondary diplomas while others have community college technical certificates or university degrees. All occupations, excluding management, are currently represented in the program. The program has moved from a large representation of custodial staff, to a broader representation of the university community. The program costs the university $30,000 for each 18 week session and release time when applicable.

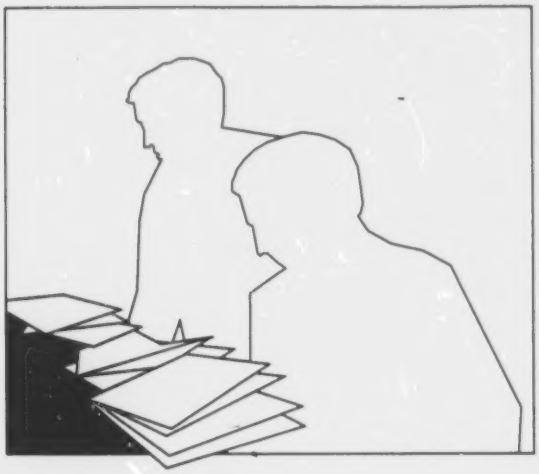
Decision Making About The Program

The University of British Columbia first initiated the contact with the Hastings Institute.

Pressures for higher quality service played a key role in the University's decision to implement the program.

Increased health and safety practices, changes in the available workforce and a need to reduce errors and waste were also important factors in their decision. Lastly, changing labour and management relations, as well as bringing the workforce together to build cross cultural learning and interaction, also contributed to the decision to implement the program.

As the Human Resource Manager mentioned identifying the training needs of the workplace and identifying the learning needs of the workers were co-equal priorities. As well, all stakeholders expressed an interest in evaluating the program impacts. Some supervisory staff believe that schools have failed to provide workers with adequate basic skills and, therefore, believe that the entry level workers need this basic skills



training to be "worth their wages". As a result, this training is offered to all employees on a first come first serve basis.

In the very early stages of planning, much discussion ensued from the different types of committee participants—from employees to management—as to the benefits and potential disadvantages of proceeding with such an initiative. Turnover, portability of training, practicality and costs were some arguments made against starting up a program.

Also during this phase the organizing committee solicited input from both the employees and their supervisors in making decisions that effected them, especially with regards to the actual design of the program. At the same time the service provider, who eventually facilitated the basic skills training and literacy groups, collaborated with both supervisors and employees about the company and trainee goals and in particular to program components such as implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

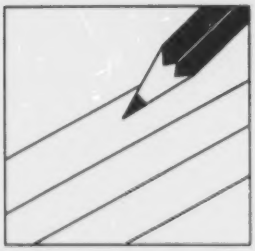
Costs and location were actual problems encountered during the initial planning and discussion stage while site and scheduling problems occurred as the program was implemented. Both start-up costs and operating costs were covered by the university. Generally speaking, all parties that were interviewed felt that they had participated in aspects of the program planning and implementation stage including a research project and examining proposals from all prospective service providers.

Program Impacts

Although informal evaluations have been conducted on the program, the University has not yet attempted to formally measure the "returns" of the program. The current criteria for evaluating program success is the completion of required hours of class time and learner and tutor assessment of trainee writing skills. In addition supervisory staff and co-workers have also been involved in evaluating program impacts. The completion rate of participants in the program is between 90-100%.

As well, there is an overall consensus by all partners that the program has had a positive impact on both individuals and the workplace.

Since the impacts of the program were rich in content and varied from person to person, a summary of each major interview on this component is reported here. The manager



interviewed explained that the program will continue whether or not funding can be secured. The service provider, as well, is committed to ensuring the continuation of the program. If it cannot, it will simply be modified given the restraints. There is a strong belief that the program is fulfilling its goals and that there is good communication between the university and the education provider. The manager was also satisfied with everything from the basic logistics of the program, to the content, learning gains, teaching methods and workplace impacts.

The supervisor connected to the program was instrumental in recruiting 19 workers to participate in the training. Here there is a strong belief that the workers learned more about communication, co-operation and problem solving. Although there were problems with the production goals, due to the amount of release time, the supervisor was satisfied with the content, learning gains and teaching methods of the program. The supervisor also noted significant improvements in the abilities of the workers to read, communicate and problem solve, as well as the morale and quality of worker interaction. He believed that error rates, the quality of output and customer satisfaction were also significantly impacted. On the other hand, a concern was raised that the people who might need the program the most, may not be taking it because of multiple responsibilities at home.

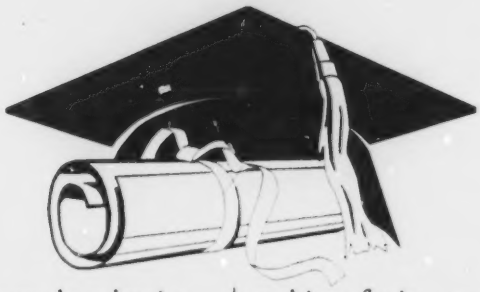
Together the trainees who were interviewed and the union representative agreed that the ability of the workers to read, communicate, demonstrate work effort and reciprocate customer satisfaction were significant and observable program impacts. They were also satisfied with their new abilities to problem solve and participate more effectively in team work. Time savings, error rates and ability to use new technologies were also reported as successful components of the program. However, there was a consensus that the program had not significantly influenced absenteeism, lateness, morale or worker safety.

Both the instructor and the program co-ordinator reported all of the above mentioned goals as being positive program impacts. However, they were not satisfied with the scheduling of the program. Threaded through all of the interviews on this program component, there was a clear consensus that the ability of the workers to read, communicate, learn new technologies and problem solve had all increased considerably and that the completion rate was further evidence of learner needs being met.

Barriers to Implementation

At the outset of the program, before researching the various options, one set of barriers experienced by management was not knowing how to design a program and the types of training available in the community.

They were unclear as to what their employees needed and what they would be getting from basic skills training.



Cost, in terms of release time was also a barrier, because they questioned whether workers would be resistant to various types of basic skill remediation. Another issue that management mentioned was the question of the employees acquiring these skills and then leaving the university for a better position. Although these barriers were clearly evident at various stages of the planning process, most of them have been worked out in a satisfactory manner.

The program co-ordinator mentioned that differences of opinion, costs, location, unexpected delays, difficulty in enrolling the first students and other start-up difficulties were problems during the implementation process. The actual participants in the program discussed time release problems, family conflicts and the embarrassment of revealing that they had a literacy-related problem, as the major barriers to their participation in the program.

Policy Influences

Many different factors would influence the university to continue or to expand the program. For example, evidence from other firms indicating that basic skills training pays for itself through increased job performance and productivity, or local forums to allow the companies to talk with employers about the contributions and challenges their programs have had would be very helpful.

As well, some type of testing developed by employer organizations to certify that workers have the basic skills required to work in such a multi-profession multi-skilled workplace would have an influence on expanding a program. These benchmark results would influence the university's decision to train workers with low competencies to achieve the levels needed for certification.

The availability of technical assistance was also a factor that would influence the university to expand the program, particularly technical assistance provided by the provincial government. A basic skills program designed and implemented by a local community college, school or other agency would also impact the decision to expand.

Finally, an employer sponsored training and education consortium would strongly influence the university's workplace education decisions, as would a federal credit to offset up to 2% of the company's contributions to the Unemployment Insurance fund. In a similar vein, a larger U.I. reduction, such as 33%, would have an even greater influence on the company's decision. Available grants which eliminated the firms "out of pocket" costs, would also significantly influence the decision to implement or expand a workplace program.

Innovative Features of the Program

One group of factors related to program innovativeness could be described as the positive psychological environment that

was created for the learning to take place in.

For example, characteristics such as the ability to work on your own, feeling relaxed in the class and not pressured for deadlines and tests along with co-operative rather than competitive communication among students fit into this category. The fact that no report cards or evaluations were given to the supervisors also contributed to a positive classroom environment.

Another key innovative feature was the flexibility of the program. The trainees stated that although learners were at different levels, or had different ideas, they still felt accepted by one another and worked well together. Teachers being able to help students in whatever area they needed help in also contributed to a flexible program. Most trainees also enjoyed working together in a situation other than work which provided a social dimension to the program.

A third factor related to program innovativeness was the thorough background work that was done by the committee on the various service providers. This helped in building open communication between union, management and within the steering committee. As a result, this openness was reflected in a program accessibility policy that allowed all workers the option of enrolling in the program.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

To further encourage thinking about workplace programs we asked this question of all participants

"What advice would you give to others planning a similar program?"

Here is a summary of their thoughtful responses.

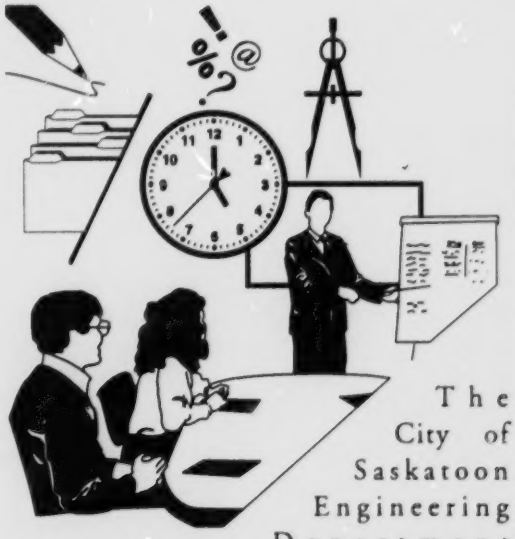
- Include employees in all the planning discussions.
- Take the time to think out the design; it may be the last chance for an employee to have an opportunity for training.
- Secure funding for the cost of the program to insure that all employees who want to take the program will be able to do so.
- Develop a partnership between union and management.
- Advise the company that it is a long term investment.
- Provide class and location flexibility.
- Be committed, able to work together and promote the program.
- Know the needs of the employees.
- Advertise the program as voluntary.

City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch

The Workers' Education for Skills Training Program

City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch

The Workers' Education for Skills Training Program



The City of Saskatoon Engineering Department implemented their workers' education for skills training program in 1993. It is a job integrated program specifically designed to meet the training needs of the Works Branch. The specific skill areas that needed attention were reading, writing, solving mathematical and work-related problems and orally communicating.

Reading and writing are the primary subjects taught in the program which is offered in a group-oriented environment. Classes meet twice a week on the work-site for two hours, during the day or after work. The course is approximately 12 weeks long. The introduction of new certification requirements, technological changes and the company's decision to transform the organization played key roles in their decision to implement the program. Efforts from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and CUPE #859 were also noteworthy precursors to the initiative.

In general, the content, participant learning gains, teaching methods and logistics are all successful aspects of the program. There is also a consensus that the program has had a significant impact on the organization as a whole and in meeting the educational needs of the employees.

One of the barriers faced during the implementation stage was the lack of resources available for employers to begin such a project. Another was the question of whether they had the infrastructure in place to adequately address the issues of both cost and the feasibility of allowing workers to leave their shifts. Concerns were also raised around whether there was really a "need" for basic skills training.

Some of the innovative features of the program include the idea of workers training workers, the cooperation from union and management and the sense of confidentiality in all program elements. These features contributed to the positive promotion of the program and the participants' feelings of "ownership".

Some of the advice that was solicited from the participants can be summarized as follows: set up a joint union/management committee to discuss and review workplace literacy needs and education, secure confidentiality, ensure that all management personnel are "on side" and request voluntary participation.

City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch

The Workers' Education for Skills Training Program

Company Background

The City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch employs 327 employees at their four different location sites. The Works Branch is a public corporation that was established in the early 1900's and is represented by CUPE Local Union #859. The Workers' Education for Skills Training Program was implemented in 1993, through a collaborated effort between the City of Saskatoon Human Resources Department, CUPE Local #859 and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's WEST Program. It is a program specifically designed to meet the training needs of the Works Branch.

The majority of employees are labourers and equipment operators holding positions such as truck drivers and grader and backhoe operators. Fifteen percent of the staff are classified as technical support, with even less staff classified as management and professional personnel. All of the work force is employed full-time with approximately 60 labourers working seasonally. Ninety-eight percent of the workforce is male, with the average age range being between 35 and 45. The ethnic background of the work force is predominantly Caucasian and Native.

The skills needed to perform the work required by the City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch include: reading, writing and math skills, communication skills, co-operative team work, problem solving skills and technical skills. There is also importance placed on equipment operating skills.

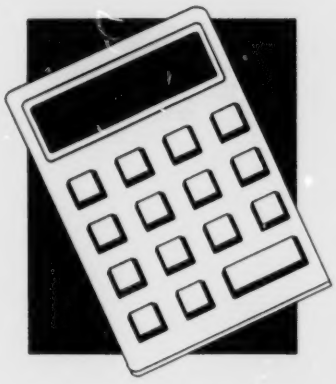
The majority of workers tend to have difficulty with technical skills, followed by communication skills, reading, writing, problem solving and team work skills.

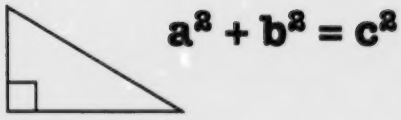
At the work site, supervisors use quality standards and formal evaluations to measure the performance of individual workers. Over the past five years there has been a trend in increased productivity and performance due to the skill level of the workers, the various types of training programs and performance management. Due to diminishing resources and other interrelated factors, one of the significant changes foreseen for the Engineering Works Branch is a reduction in the size of their workforce. This downsizing will likely occur through attrition.

Human Resources Policy

Jobs are usually filled internally, as the company has a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement. The company gives priority to these employees when hiring above entry level positions. Unfortunately, there are some employees whose skills are too low to make them promotable.

The company policy is more generous than average in regards to sick leave and about average in regards to vacation leave. Absenteeism has been one area that company policy has attempted to address. The





Branch offers on-the-job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off-site training and education and in-house seminars. This kind of training and education culture has been constant over the last few years. Wages at the Engineering Works Branch are higher than similar employees in the area and the surrounding labour market. They also offer a competitive fringe benefit package that includes: health, life and disability insurance, pensions and tuition reimbursement.

For all employees in the Branch the basic skills and qualifications required are reading, writing and math skills, technical skills and communication skills. Problem solving skills were also mentioned as being specific to certain labour jobs and certain management jobs.

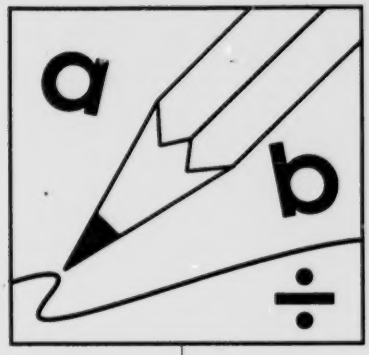
Several human resource issues emerging within the Branch are currently receiving attention. Some of these involve employee morale, worker-management relations and the recruitment and hiring of qualified workers.

The specific skill areas of the workers are also believed to be of concern. These areas include such abilities as reading, writing, solving mathematical problems, orally communicating and solving work-related problems. Lack of promotional opportunities from within, absenteeism, lateness, labour costs, as well as customer relations, were also mentioned as human resource issues. The shortage of technical skills among the employees has been attributed to the recent introduction of new technology. In this particular work environment the organization has responded to this gap by expanding their training programs and utilizing subcontractors.

Program Description

The City of Saskatoon Engineering Works Branch has been operating the program for two years. It is a job integrated program that has been customized to meet the needs of the Branch. From the management's point of view, the goal of the program is to improve customer relations, reduce errors, as well as transform it's work organization. Having these goals means that more effort towards promotion from within the company must become a priority. There is also a general feeling across the Branch that this kind of training promotes employee loyalty and reduces turnover. From the employees point of view, the goals of the program are self improvement ones like learning the basic skills of reading and writing and up-grading to a grade 12.

A standing committee is responsible for administering the program and is made up of a



top management representative, a human resource manager, a program co-ordinator and a union representative. The program is jointly administered by both union and management. It is delivered from inside the firm and counselling support services are offered under the auspices of the Employee & Family Assistance Program.

Services and Training Delivered

There are a variety of teaching methods utilized in the program. Self-paced workbooks provide the participants with the independence to work at their own pace. This is all done within a group oriented environment.

Reading and writing are the primary subjects taught in the program.

The classes meet twice a week, at the worksite, for 2 hours, either during the day or after work, on a fairly flexible schedule. The course is approximately 12 weeks long and the participants meet on both employer and employee time. Participation in the program is voluntary. Each season one or two sessions are offered.

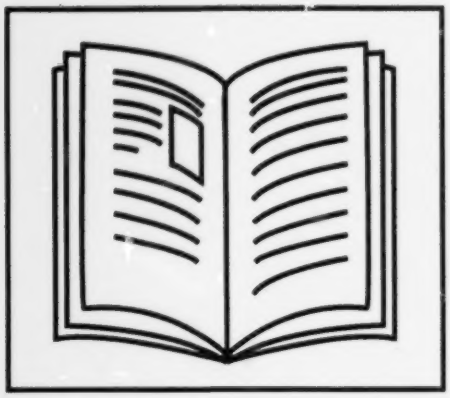
Over the two years of operation, learners have been labourers or equipment operators. Typically, there are 4-5 people in a group. The participants are men between the ages of 30 to 63 and predominantly Caucasian. A significant proportion of the participants possess native languages other than English. Their educational backgrounds range from some high school to Grade 8 or less.

Decision Making About The Program

The introduction of new certification requirements, technological changes and the company's decision to transform the work organization played a key role in the decision to implement the program.

As well, efforts from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and CUPE #859 to move the idea into the implementation stage were noteworthy. Workers also identified the need for training and although there was some initial resistance from management, the initiative of an internal volunteer worker to do the training was a catalyst. The funding is shared between the Branch, the union and the employees.

One of the priorities of the standing committee was to identify the learning needs of the workers. Therefore the input of employees was solicited



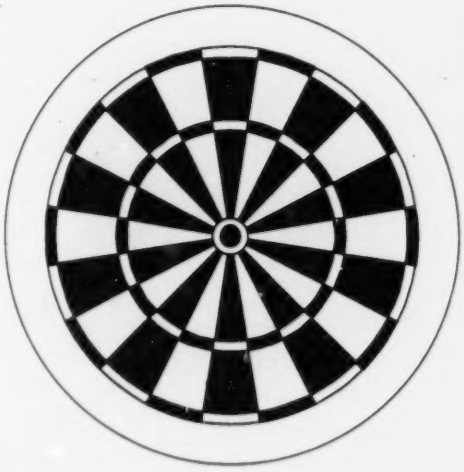
during the developmental stages of the program. This same group continues to be involved in the delivery of the program through the use of program surveys and employee evaluations. During the program's inception the instructor talked to management, the supervisors and the employees about their individual goals and what they wanted to see in such an initiative. Workplace needs assessments are conducted by WEST Program Co-ordinators and the information gathered in these interviews is not shared with management personnel or human resources.

All of the employees enrolled in the training view the program as a voluntary fringe benefit. They see the chance to learn as value added to their jobs and their personal lives. Some believe that this type of training may lead to advancement.

Program Impacts

Since the program is relatively new, impacts are somewhat more difficult to measure. It's for this reason that the comments made in this section may more accurately reflect initial outcomes than results from sustained experience. The completion rate of the program is roughly 80%, with the criteria being the demonstration of task mastery in the instructed subjects and the completion of required hours of class attendance.

In the following paragraphs a summation of the respondents various satisfactions with the program will further elaborate on this idea of impact. The human resource manager of the Branch believed



that the program is fulfilling it's goals and is satisfied with both the program co-ordinator and the instructor. The content, participant learning gains, teaching methods and the logistics were also mentioned as successful aspects of the program. The union representative also expressed satisfaction with all aspects of the program. Both the instructor and program co-ordinator felt that other program impacts were related to the participatory nature of the process as well as the fact that the work environment had been positively changed as the employees completed their training. Most of the workers mentioned that they enjoyed being involved in the decision making process and would like to see this continue.

Some of the specific areas of program impact that were consistently mentioned by all the stakeholders included: the ability of the workers to read, communicate and problem solve, morale, quality of worker interaction and the ability of the workers to work independently.

Other work-related areas that had seen some kind of improvement were: error rates, worker safety and the ability to use new technologies. Lastly, the potential for advancement was noted as a program impact. Overall, interviewees agreed that the program had a significant impact on the organization and that all of the participants hoped for the expansion of the program.

Barriers to Implementation

There were many good reasons that led the Engineering Works Branch to implement the program and very few barriers that they encountered along the way. As previously mentioned, the introduction of new technology and certificate requirements were the key factors in deciding to get started.

Although management had suspected the need for the program, they were not sure how to address the problem or what the specific needs of their employees were.

As one respondent noted, "There are very few resources that exist for employers interested in implementing workplace education programs".

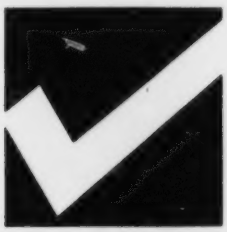
Management also questioned whether they had the infrastructure to adequately address the problem of workplace literacy. Early discussions focused on how many workers would be allowed to participate, due to both cost and the feasibility of allowing workers to leave their shifts. As well, there was some question by management as to the appropriateness of paying employees for 50% of the time they spent in class and whether there really was the "need" for basic skills training. At the outset of the program, location of the classroom was unsuitable, as it infringed upon confidentiality. However, this problem was quickly resolved, as it was decided to move the classroom to a more convenient and private site.

Policy Influences

The practical nature of the program coupled with the actual success rate are two examples of issues that would influence the company to expand the program. The manager believes that the company would be more likely to expand a workplace education program if the course work continued to be job integrated and if there was evidence indicating that the basic skills training pays for itself. Local forums or networks making accessible the contributions of other similar programs would significantly influence the Branch to expand its delivery. Job task profiles which are developed by employer organizations to certify that workers have the basic skills to work in the industry would also influence the company's decision to train workers with low competencies in order to achieve the levels needed for certification.

Technical assistance provided by employee associations, or the services of a local community college, school, or other agency offering to provide a basics skills program would also positively influence the Branch to expand its delivery.

The Works Branch interest to expand would also be affected by a variety of different financial factors. For example, an employer sponsored training and education consortium would definitely have an impact on their decision. Being asked to provide paid release time for employees to take part in a program funded outside the firm, or being in receipt of a federal tax credit, or offsetting the cost of training by up to 2% of the company's contribution to the unemployment insurance fund, would all be influential factors. A larger U.I. reduction would have an even greater influence. Participants renegotiating their benefit package to trade off the cost of the program for spending on other fringe benefits or employees agreeing to contribute a percentage of their salary, along with the confirmation that they would remain long enough to recoup the investment would also strongly influence the company's decision to expand the program.



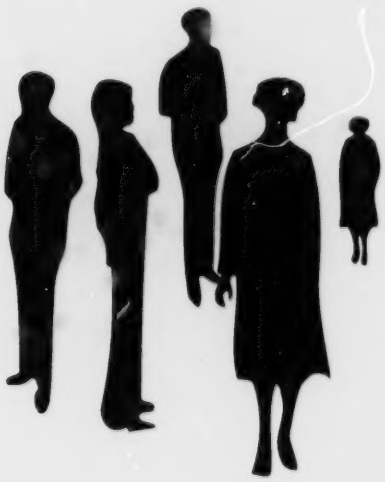
Innovative Features of the Program

There are many features that make this program innovative.

The whole idea around workers training workers, the co-operation from union and management and the sense of confidentiality in all program elements were the features most frequently mentioned by all levels of employees.

The capability and commitment of the course leader and the voluntary, "learner-centred" focus were also mentioned as being highly successful components of the program.

The positive promotion of the program, along with the co-operation and support of all levels of staff contributed towards the participants feelings of "ownership" of the program. They felt that there was no imposed agenda or testing and examinations required from management. These features collectively, created an environment conducive to learning at the workplace.



Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

Advice was solicited from all of the participants in the program and can be summarized as follows:

- set up a joint union/management committee to discuss and review workplace literacy needs and education.
- involve local unions as part of the implementation process as members may be more likely to come forward.
- confidentiality.
- ensure that all management personnel are "on side" in implementing a workplace program.
- set up a committee to monitor the program with regard to scheduling problems, logistics and evaluation.
- do not assume that the employees identified as candidates will come forward.
- do not coerce employees into participating in a workplace literacy program.

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The Calgary Herald

A Workplace Learning Centre

The Calgary Herald

A Workplace Learning Centre

The Calgary Herald, established in 1883, is a member of one of Canada's largest newspaper groups, Southam Incorporated. Shifts at the Herald run continuously - 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Significant downsizing, an increase in the yearly turnover rate and improving employee skills were important issues to the company. Therefore, after careful consideration, a needs analysis was implemented by ABC Canada in 1992 and the Learning Centre at the Herald was introduced. The needs assessment indicated a need for basic skills training in the areas of written and oral communication, GED preparation, plain writing, English as a second language and computer skills. These skills were taught through methods such as self-paced workbooks, computer-based work and interactive group methods. They also utilized individual tutors, a mentoring program and audio-visual tapes. The Learning Centre is accessible 24 hours a day for the employees to study independently and an instructor is available days or evenings, for two or three hours, depending on employee needs.

A strong sense of corporate leadership, pressures from customers and corporate buyers to improve their product and the workers' identification of a need for basic skills training were key issues in the newspaper's decision to implement their workplace education program. The impact of the program has enhanced the ability to produce both a quality product and a quality service. This was a particular challenge because of the need to continually adapt to the changing needs of the organization and its culture.

During the implementation process, the company had to address not only some of the logistical problems such as costs, location, delays and the use of more than one consultant, but also some apprehensions about what to expect in launching such an initiative. The company's flexibility and strong commitment to the program were just two of the many innovative features of the program. These two factors contributed to an environment that supported life-long learning within a flexible, self-paced learning facility, with supportive management and quality instructors.

The Calgary Herald

A Workplace Learning Centre

Company Background

The Calgary Herald, established in 1883, is a member of one of Canada's largest newspaper groups, Southam Incorporated. Southam represents approximately 28% of the total newspaper circulation in Canada today. The Herald employs 553 employees full time and 139 additional full time equivalents. Shifts run 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. The company is a public corporation, represented by Graphic Communications International Union, Local 34C.

Major customers of the newspaper include both large and small manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and individual citizens. The market is both local and provincial with one major newspaper as a competitor. The majority of employees are production people, supervisors, editorial employees, foremen/women, sales and service and technical people. The average age of the workforce is 40, with more than half of their employees being male.

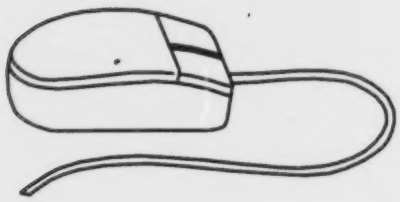
Anticipated changes in the company over the next five years will probably focus on the expansion in the size of the markets, workforce restructuring and increasing the profits.

Human Resources Policy

The average length of service for employees at the Calgary Herald is approximately 13 years. Over 100 workers, mostly clerical staff, left last year. Some took a voluntary package. This type of yearly turnover rate has significantly increased over the past five years. There has also been significant downsizing with production workers being the hardest hit.

Jobs above entry level are usually filled internally, however, the company does not have a policy which defines the career ladder within the organization. Although they do have a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement, training often follows promotions. Unfortunately, the company has some employees whose skill levels are too low to make them promotable.

The Herald has a more generous than average policy regarding sick leave and vacation pay. Their wages are higher than similiar employers in the area and in the local market. The company offers on the job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off-site training or education and in-house seminars. As well, there is an extensive range of fringe benefits, such as health, life and disability insurance, profit sharing (share purchase program), pensions, parental leave, tuition reimbursement and a bonus plan based on profits.



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With the recent introduction to new technology over the past five years, the Herald has increased the type of training programs and the number of sub-contractors. They have attempted to measure labour productivity, or performance by estimating labour costs, wastage and error rates. Over this same time period, the trend in productivity has increased due to the recruitment of better workers and cooperation between labour management relations.

Perceptions of the most serious human resource issues at the Calgary Herald vary.

At one end of the spectrum issues such as labour costs, waste of material and lack of opportunities for promotion are considered serious.

At the other end, there is a perception that lack of basic employee skills like reading, writing and math skills are problem areas.

The basic skills reported by employees as necessary for their day-to-day work included: reading, writing and math skills, technical skills, communication skills, team work and effective problem solving skills.

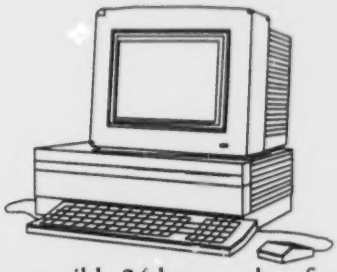
Program Description

The Learning Centre at the Herald was set-up following a needs analysis carried out by ABC Canada in 1992.

The needs survey identified a need for basic skills training in the areas of written and oral communications, GED preparation, plain writing, English as a second language and computer skills.

The Herald, at this particular time, was going through a period of rapid change and wanted the programs offered in their workplace to respond to those changes.

The service provider, Alberta Vocational College, is 32 years old and has been involved in workplace education efforts for the past 10 years. They have served 6 firms to date and although the firms often contact them, they have had to spend more time trying to market their services. The workplace program at The Calgary Herald has been in operation for two years. It is administered by the Director of Human Resources, the Staff Development Co-ordinator and a liaison person



who works between the program participants and the program administrator.

The Calgary Herald's commitment to workplace education programs is reflected in their tuition reimbursement plan and the fact that they do not view the program as a "fringe benefit." They also offer support services such as tutoring, counselling and child care services. Wages, however, are not raised after training is completed.

Services and Training

There are a variety of teaching methods used in the program. Self-paced workbooks, computer based work and interactive group methods are just a few examples of the types of teaching methods preferred by the learners. There are also individual tutors, a mentoring program, audio and video tapes and access to a private library.

Classes meet Monday through to Thursday, depending on employee needs. The instructor is available days or evenings, for 2-4 hours, 5 times a week, on both company and employee time. The Learning Centre is accessible 24 hours a days for employees to study independently. It is unknown which occupations are currently represented by program participants, due to the fact that all participants are guaranteed confidentiality. The courses vary in length and are voluntary.

In the first year of the program, 116 people participated. There are usually 5-10 people in each seminar all with various educational backgrounds. Most trainees are in individual self-paced programs, so class time can vary from 15 minutes to two hours. Most of the participants have some high school background or a grade 12 diploma. Because of confidentiality, statistics are not kept on learner characteristics such as age, native language, sex or ethnic background. The cost of the program is approximately $33,000.00 a year or $300.00 per participant, per year.

Decision-Making About the Program

The Calgary Herald is a community leader with a strong sense of corporate and community leadership.

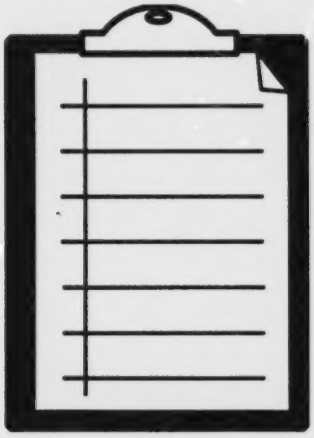
Pressures from customers and corporate buyers for quality improvement played a key role in its decision to implement the program.

It also believed that with a program in place new customers would be attracted to its products. In addition, the workers identified a need for basic training and proceeded to negotiate it with the union.

Changes in production methods, increased competition, the introduction of new technology, the need to reduce errors, waste and scrappage and the decision to transform the organization were all important factors contributing to the decision to implement the program.

Some members of the program administration committee identified the training needs of the workplace as a first priority. They believed that entry level workers at the company needed basic skills training since schools had failed to teach these skills.

Collectively the management, the supervisors, the union and the employees all argued in favour of the program, with their only concern being the



"cost". Input into the decision making process and design of the program was participatory with both employees and supervisors taking ownership. The goals for the program were discussed among management, supervisors and employees.

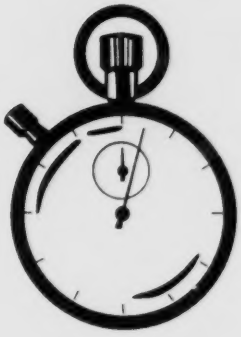
Program Impacts

The Calgary Herald has tried to measure the returns of the program by conducting formal evaluations. This has been done through surveys focusing on the teaching of the program. No statistics are available at this time which describe the completion rate of the program.

Many program participants have voiced their opinions concerning the impact of the program. The manager, for example, was satisfied with the delivery, the content and the teaching methods, but was uncertain about the participant learning gains and the workplace impacts.

The supervisor who was instrumental in learner recruitment believed that the participants were learning technical skills, reading, writing and math skills and communication skills.

Employees commitment to attend the program and their

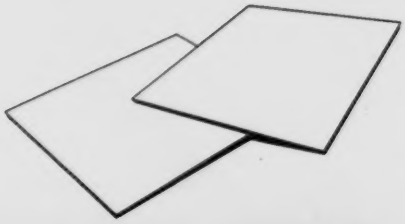


cooperative-team work back on the floor were signals that participants were satisfied.

The supervisor, who had participated in all aspects of the program design felt that the whole workplace initiative had been able to adapt to the constantly changing needs of the organization.

Both the co-ordinator and the instructor corroborated that the ability of the workers to communicate, compute and use new technologies were positive program impacts. They also noted that company loyalty, quality of worker interaction and customer satisfaction had significantly increased. Both were satisfied with the participant learning gains and teaching methods, but had some reservations about recruitment and participation for all employees.

The employees themselves indicated that their ability to use machinery, perform technical tasks and communicate with other workers, had been positively impacted. They also indicated that their ability to ask questions and work independently had improved as were their abilities to read, communicate and problem solve. Overall, they concluded that time savings had been positively changed and that they felt a stronger sense of company loyalty. They indicated that all of these areas collectively enhanced the ability to produce both a quality product and a quality service.



Barriers to Implementation

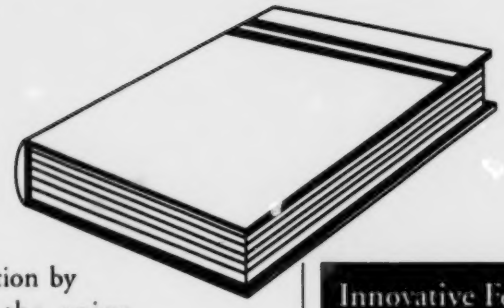
One of the problems encountered during the implementation process was that more than one consultant was used to launch the program. Costs, location, unexpected delays and other start-up difficulties also had to be addressed. Although the Herald had no experience in designing and implementing such a program, participants feel it is a success. Concerns over resistant workers and integrating basic skills training with other training were all problems that were worked through.

Additional barriers mentioned by other stakeholders fell under the category of company apprehension.

Because the program was so novel, no one knew what to expect or what the actual needs of the company were.

Other impediments were costs, particularly in release time and the perception that there would be a high turnover rates in some categories of workers.

At the outset of the planning phase the employees weren't quite sure what they would be getting out of the program, whether it would be effective and whether the program was actually needed. These concerns were altered as the program got off the ground. Cost was, once again, mentioned as a



barrier to implementation by the employees and the union representative. Unexpected delays and the difficulty in enrolling the first students were also barriers that took a long time to iron out.

Policy Decisions

There are a multitude of factors that would influence the company to expand the program. For example, the company would be more likely to expand if the content was more job integrated. Establishing local forums or networks allowing the company to talk with other employers about the contributions and challenges their programs have had, or the development of tests to certify that workers have the necessary skills to work in the area would also influence the company's decision to expand.

Several cost related factors would also influence the company's decision, such as the provision of a federal tax credit, or offsetting the costs of training by up to 2% of the company's contribution to Unemployment Insurance Coverage. A more substantial U.I.C. reduction would have an even greater influence on the decision making process. Renegotiating their benefit package to trade off the cost of such a program would also have a strong influence. If employees agreed to contribute a percentage of their wages to a workplace training fund, or grants were made available, these types of financial subsidizing would also influence the company to expand the program.

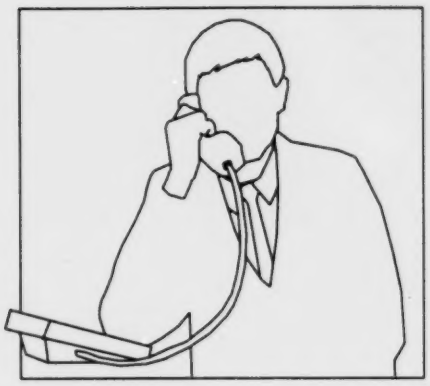
Innovative Features of the Program

There are many innovative features of the Calgary Herald program.

Flexibility and commitment from senior management in developing a culture that supported continuous learning was key to its success.

It is very important that the corporate culture support lifelong learning, as was the case in this program. Creating an environment that doesn't punish risk takers, allowing employees to attend seminars and designating funds for training also are innovative features of the workplace education program. The corporation must be willing to make very difficult choices to ensure that funding remains, even in periods of downsizing or lay-offs.

It is also important that a program be flexible; with adaptable hours, delivered on site, in a comfortable environment with up-to-date technology. Running educational programs in a workplace demands a fair degree of flexibility. The operation hours of the learning centre must be flexible, the instructors must be flexible and the partnership between the company and the program need to be flexible. In this case, the program was facilitated by relaxed, approachable instructors and was free to participants.



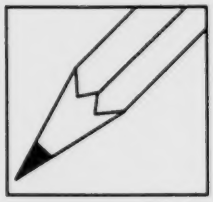
The quality of the teaching staff, learning resources and the practice manuals were also mentioned as key features of the program. Identifying the needs of all of the employees and then allowing open access to the learning facility so that they can take advantage of the resources was also an important factor in the success of the program.

Flexibility, variety29, self-paced learning, delivered by approachable instructors with quality resources - along with supportive management, committed to a strong partnership are the most crucial components of a workplace program.

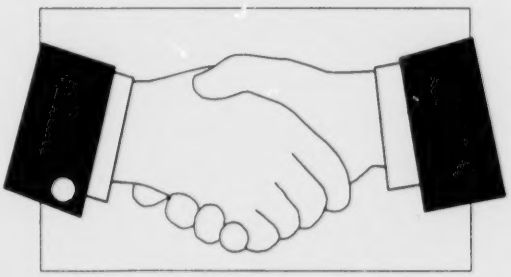
Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

The Calgary Herald has shown itself to be committed to supporting and promoting their learning program as a part of a larger vision... of being a "learning organization". The valuable advise that they offer to others who are just starting up a program can be summarized, as follows:

- show the leaders in your organization the financial benefits.
- provide an organizational needs assessment to determine the appropriate training needs.



- allow all levels of the organization the opportunity to participate in a flexible self-paced program.
- develop an organizational culture that promotes lifelong learning.
- secure unwavering support from senior management who will commit to an ongoing budget.
- solicit an internal champion to own the program, with a multi-level team to function as a steering/advisory committee.
- seek out a learning centre model with instructional assistance.
- tie learning centre activities and courses to human resource development and the employee appraisal process.
- hire instructors who possess a multitude of skills and attitudes.
- use the collected experience of others to plan and deliver a program that incorporates accepted standards of good practice.

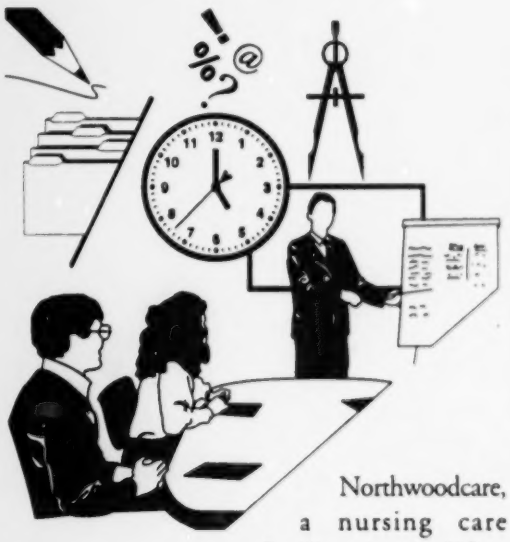


Northwoodcare, A Halifax Nursing Care Facility

Workplace Education Program

Northwoodcare, A Halifax Nursing Care Facility

Workplace Education Program



Northwoodcare, a nursing care facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a non-profit, community-based organization which created a workplace education program to upgrade the educational needs of staff. The program, which was pioneered over four years ago, is considered to be a unique and important staff education venture by all employees.

Reading, writing and math activities, English as a second language, GED preparation and some life skills were taught in the program. Classes met for two hours, once or twice a week and usually ran for approximately four to six months at the work site on both company and employee time.

Department of Education instructors and volunteer tutors assisted in the delivery of the program. It was a program founded, operated, funded and supported through a cooperative effort of staff, management, labour and government. All types of employees, supervisors, union representatives and managers worked together to make the program work. It was considered by the different stakeholders to be a great success. Not only did the program impact individual trainee reading scores, but human resource issues such as worker interaction, problem solving, absenteeism and lateness were significantly improved.

Some of the challenges encountered during the implementation of the workplace education program were those common to most companies when pioneering a new initiative. This organization was flexible and strengthened their existing infrastructure in order to resolve logistical difficulties while employees participated in the program. Sustaining funding was the major hinderance confronting Northwoodcare's basic skills program. This funding issue continues to be the most significant consideration in the company's decision to expand the service.

One of the many innovative features of the program was the co-operation of all the major stakeholders. Caring, committed instructors and program coordinators along with the customized levels of instruction were features unique to this training program at Northwoodcare. A powerful impact as a result of the program was increased employee self-confidence and belief in themselves.

The program participants offer practical advice to others interested in initiating a workplace education program. This advice consists of: devoting time and effort to recruiting participants, securing support from those involved in the program, recognizing the participants' significant achievements and documenting the impact that specific workplace training has on the employees and employers.

Northwoodcare, A Halifax Nursing Care Facility

Workplace Education Program

Company Background

Approximately 800 people work at Northwoodcare, a nursing care facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Northwoodcare, established in 1962, is considered to be serving a niche market because its services are unique to the area and because its size is at least triple that of its nearest competitor. A board of governors consisting of community members runs this non-profit, community based organization. This publicly funded company has been represented by the Canadian Autoworkers Union for less than a year. The previous union began in the dietary section, spread to housekeeping, maintenance and nursing and had represented Northwoodcare for approximately ten years.

The majority of employees at Northwoodcare are labourers, with fewer clerical, management and professional staff. A small proportion of all these employees are employed part-time or seasonally.

Although 80% of the employees are female, the top managers are all male.

The average age of the workforce is between 35-40. A small proportion, 5-10%, do not speak English as their first language. The largest percentage of employees are Caucasian, followed by a small percentage of African Canadians and Natives, as well as, other ethnic backgrounds.

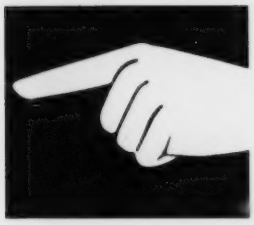
Reading dietary information, improving work related problem solving skills and developing more independent thinking were the skills workers needed to develop further. As well, tight schedules and changing supervision on rotating shifts were creating a higher dependency on the current supervisory staff and on the need to read and interpret the dietary flow charts and schedules. Work at Northwoodcare had been organized in such a manner to accommodate the present level of employee skills.

Turnover rate is extremely low at Northwoodcare. One of the key reasons for this is because of the high rate of pay for unskilled labour, (nine dollars per hour). Therefore, many part-time employees who work elsewhere or university students keep their job at Northwoodcare. The labour force is fairly stable boasting a turnover rate of between 0-10%. In general, sales are continuing to grow and the market is expanding. This, in turn, has created the need for expanding a variety of training programs.

Human Resources Policy

The yearly turnover rate, although relatively low, has increased over the past few years and there has been a trend in downsizing. For example, approximately 110 workers left last year - 100 of them labourers. Eight workers were laid off, 5 in management and three in clerical support.

On occasion the company fills jobs internally, but does not give priority to current employees when hiring above entry level positions.



They do not have a policy which defines a career ladder within the organization, or have a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement.

Training often follows promotion, however, the company does have some employees whose skills are too low to make them promotable.

Management, clerical support, professional and production people, technical staff and labourers all require the same skills for promotion at Northwoodcare. These include: technical skills, reading, writing and math skills, communication skills, individual motivation, co-operative team work and problem solving skills.

The most important incentive for setting up the workplace program was a "community charity" type of incentive. A few forward thinking people at Northwoodcare simply wanted some of their staff members to have an opportunity to improve their education levels.

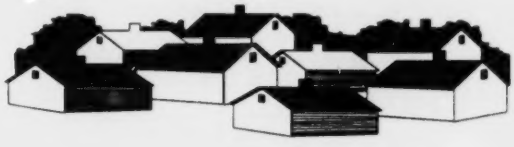
With some success the company has attempted to address these issues through the use of short term training programs, temporary agencies, quality circles, new technology and the recruitment of more highly skilled workers. They have also hired workers through government training programs such as Canada Jobs Strategy and the African-Canadian Employment Centre.

The company offers a more generous than average policy regarding sick leave and vacation pay, as well as providing on-the-job training assistance, paid release time for off-site training or education and in-house seminars. The company also offers health, life and disability insurance, pensions and parental leave.

Program Description

The workplace education program at Northwoodcare had been in place for four years. It was administered by a training co-ordinator, along with a standing committee comprised of top management, an outside consultant, union representatives, employee representatives and program participants. There was also a person who liaised between the program participants and the program administrator. The services were delivered by an outside education consultant who used employee volunteers and volunteers who did not work for the firm.

Although wages were not increased after any type of training was completed, the participants in the workplace education program had access to tutoring, counselling and a tuition reimbursement plan. The program was not seen as a fringe benefit, but "as a unique and important staff education venture".



Services and Training Delivered

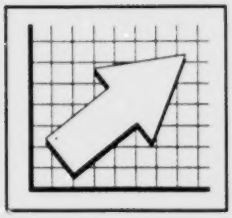
There were many different methods of teaching utilized in the basic skills program at Northwoodcare.

Group and individual reading, writing and math activities were the main methods used.

English as a second language, GED preparation and some life skills were also taught in the program.

Labourers were the group which mainly participated in the program. They met during work or after work for two hours, once or twice a week. The voluntary course was 4-6 months long and took place at the work site on both company and employee time.

Thirty-six people participated in last year's program. Typically, there were approximately 3-10 people in each class with a slightly higher proportion of female participants. The age range of participants was between 21 to 65. Eight percent of these participants spoke native languages other than English. Several participants had some high school, others had grade eight or less.



All release time was sponsored by workers, either doing work more quickly, or by working "short handed". Department of Education instructors and tutors volunteered their services while one instructor who was hired through a provincial grant, to teach two programs, was paid about $9,000.00.

Decision Making About the Program

The Northwoodcare program was a program established, operated, funded and supported through a cooperative effort of staff, management, labour and government. Differences of opinion over the design of the program, costs, location and unexpected delays were all mentioned as problems during the implementation process.

The company felt that they could have spent more time in the planning stage of the program by identifying the training needs of the workplace and workers, finding the instructor, designing the curriculum, recruiting participants and finally securing funds to support the program.

The decision to transform the work organization was a key factor in the firms decision to implement the program.

With the introduction of new technology and increased health and safety practices, the need for training became more apparent. However, the

most important factor in the decision to set up the program was management's feeling that providing needy staff with education was simply a good thing to do for employees.

All of the employees at Northwoodcare argued in favour of the program. However, some supervisors did question how the program was going to impact on their day-to-day scheduling. Cost was another argument made against the program, however the firm was able to find outside public funding for start-up costs and also to share the operating costs.

Overall, input from the organizing group was solicited when the program was first developed and both supervisors and employees were given the opportunity to discuss their goals for the program. A project team consisting of workers, supervisors, union representatives and Department of Education personnel all worked co-operatively to facilitate a fair and equal decision making process at Northwoodcare.

Program Impacts

Over the last year Northwoodcare tried to measure the returns of the program by having the participants take part in surveys and evaluations. The completion rate of the program was approximately 86%. The criteria was defined as the completion of required classroom hours.

Pre and post tests were used to measure the educational gains of many of the program participants and in all cases the test scores increased. Everyone interviewed agreed that the program at Northwoodcare was a great success.

The top manager of the company believed that the program was fulfilling its goals and was very satisfied with the delivery agency and the program instructors. The supervisor believed that the workers were also very satisfied with the program. She observed increased learning gains among her employees and would like to see additional training of this nature in the workplace. She also thought that because of the impact the program had on the company in terms of loyalty, morale, quality of worker interaction, higher supervisor ratings and customer satisfaction, that the program was well worth its cost to the company and should be expanded.

The instructor and education specialist also noted significant program impacts. These included quality of worker interaction and team work, company loyalty and stronger communication skills. Both were satisfied with the content of the program, the employee participation rate and the logistics. The union representative and employees who participated in the program both felt that the

increased ability of the workers to read and to communicate was a significant impact. The employees also believed that their ability to work independently had significantly changed. All participants corroborated that the program had positively changed the worker's ability to problem solve and noted some desired changes in absenteeism and lateness, morale and quality of worker interaction. The employees also mentioned the personal satisfaction that they experienced participating in the program and that things such as their confidence, self-esteem, family life and satisfaction with the company had all improved.

Barriers to Implementation

Although the trainees spoke favourably about the program content, levels of assessment, teaching methods and the teachers, difficulties were encountered and resolved during the implementation process.

According to the education specialist some of the early problems were due to the company not yet knowing "how to" design a program.

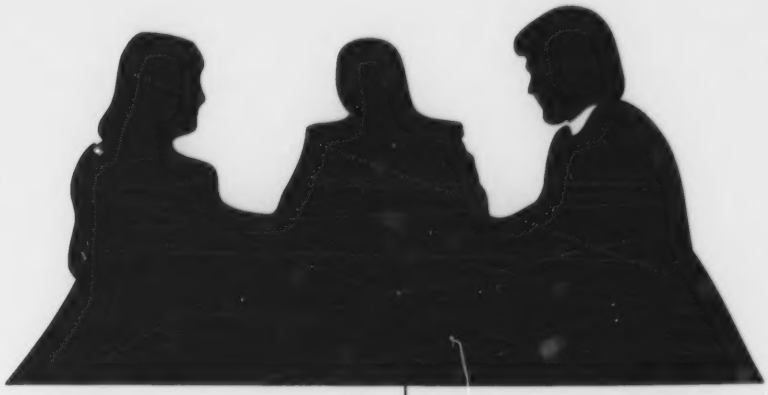
Connected to this was the lack of awareness in conducting a needs assessment and not knowing exactly what they would get from basic skills training. As well, the company did not have the infrastructure to carry out the training program and had other priorities that demanded a lot of time. It was felt that these barriers might be initially experienced when any company develops its first basic skills program.

The education specialist added that costs, location, differences of opinion on the design of the program and unexpected delays were all problems that were resolved before the first classes began.

Policy Influences

Sustainable funding was the major obstacle facing Northwoodcare's basic skills program. It was stated that most other potential policy influences would have little or no influence on the decision to expand the workplace education program. For example, if a community college, school or other agency offered to design, implement and provide a program at no cost, this would strongly influence their decision to expand the program. If grants were available to reduce the firm's out of pocket costs, this too would strongly influence the decision to expand the program.

The top manager who was interviewed indicated that if the government would provide more than just "seed money", cost sharing beyond the start up, or tax breaks, Northwoodcare would be more likely to expand the program. Another manager explained that programs of this type usually show some long term significant impacts on the workplace in the form of improved skills, improved self-esteem and therefore increased



productivity. If these impacts can be better documented over a few years then a company would more likely sustain such a training program. Funding for the program remains the most significant factor in the company's decision to expand it.

Innovative Features of the Program

There are a variety of features which made the Northwoodcare program innovative. It was a program established, operated, funded and supported through a co-operative effort of staff, management, labour and government.

Employees helped each other on the job so they could attend classes which helped the groups become closely knit and mutually supportive.

The program became an exciting venture for everyone — always a topic of conversation and always associated with feelings of good morale.

The people on the project team who were involved with the program were committed a 100% to making it a success.

Another feature of innovativeness was the personalities of the instructors and program co-ordinator. They cared for the workers and worked hard to make the program a success. As a result, the employees came to believe in themselves and their own abilities. Coupled with this was the fact that employees were dedicated to their class responsibilities and supervisors were dedicated to assisting their employees with scheduling issues and other such tasks. The comfortable pace, matched time and flexibility were other features that made the program unique.

Different levels of instruction also made the program inclusive and welcoming to all participants. There were three levels of instruction: level 1 (one-to-one tutoring), level 2 (intermediate) and level 3 (GED preparation). Often classroom tutors were actually drawn from the more advanced level of instruction. This type of teaching interaction positively affected work relationships back on the shop floor. A co-operative project that was organized with all levels of participants was a company publication.

Another feature of innovativeness was the spin off effect that the program had on the employees' personal lives. These were such things as "no longer feeling stupid", or being able to "help their children reading their homework", or "feeling confident in their ability to work independently" and "believing in themselves".

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

Northwoodcare offers the following advice to those interested in implementing a workplace education program:

- establish a committee at the beginning with goals and ways of evaluating its goals.
- find out "how to" get people to participate
- get upper and middle management to support the program from the very first step.
- provide a stable, permanent space for classes.
- participants who complete the program must be publicly recognized for their achievements.
- community resources and expertise must be tapped into such as the Literacy Section of the provincial government.

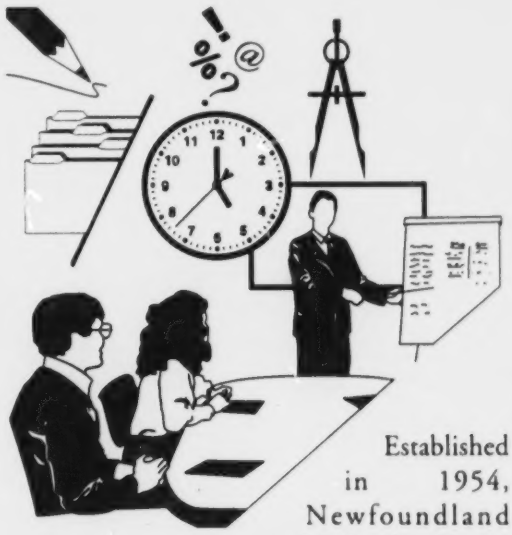
- consult with other companies who have had programs.
- offer the program to ALL employees.
- specific workplace related information and activities should be included in some courses for some employees.
- the "impact" of the specific work place training should be documented.

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro

Learning Initiatives for Tomorrow

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro

Learning Initiatives for Tomorrow



Established in 1954, Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro employ approximately 1000 full-time employees at thirteen major locations, thirty-eight diesel plants and line maintenance depots. This Hydro Group of Companies is the fourth largest utility of installed generating capacity in Canada.

Before the workplace program was implemented, information was gathered from 112 employees at six company sites to determine the company's specific basic skills training needs, along with recommended strategies for implementation. As a pilot project, two work sites were chosen for participation in the initiative. A regional sub-committee of two management and two union members administer the program at each of the two sites. Due to the variety of services offered at the two different locations, a full-time manager monitors the program. The training programs are primarily delivered by volunteer employee tutors, although a part-time, paid tutor is at each site.

There are several different types of teaching methods utilized by the tutors in the basic skills program. Self-paced workbooks, computer-based work and distance education are all used to strengthen the participant's reading, writing, math, communication and high school equivalency upgrading. Classes meet around the employee's work schedule and center on specific worker needs.

The impact of the program has been unanimously described by all participants as being satisfactory. Reading, writing, computing and problem-solving were the skills most frequently expressed as having the most impact back on the job. Time savings, error rates, improved worker safety, quality of output and the ability to use machinery were also mentioned as observable impacts. Increased confidence, a brighter career picture and a more quality family life were some of the more personal impacts expressed.

Several different barriers encountered during the implementation of the program included the mismatch between workers' needs and available training, as well as some resistance to the idea of basic level training. Costs, the site locations, delays and difficulty enrolling the first students were also mentioned as start-up problems.

Worker input was actively encouraged during the implementation and delivery of an "employee focused" workplace education program. This innovative approach resulted in training that responded to the identified needs of the workers and feelings of ownership of the program.

The advice offered by the participants is to: complete a workplace needs assessment, listen and respond to employee needs, solicit support, utilize community resources, organize one project site at a time and develop a clear communication network.

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro

Learning Initiatives for Tomorrow

Company Background

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro is the parent company of the Hydro Group of Companies comprising Hydro, Churchill Falls Corporation Limited CF(L)Co, Lower Churchill Development Corporation Limited, Gull Island Power Company Limited and Twin Falls Power Corporation Limited. By virtue of its controlling interest in CF(L)Co, Hydro is the fourth largest utility in Canadian terms of installed generating capacity.

Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, established in 1954, employs approximately 1000 full-time employees at their thirteen major locations, thirty-eight diesel plants and line maintenance depots. CF(L)Co has a permanent workforce of about 250 employees. While Hydro is principally a wholesaler of electricity and sells the bulk of its power to an investor-owned utility and several industrial customers, it does sell directly to over 3400 customers living in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

The company workforce can best be described as predominantly technical, followed by production people, management and supervisory.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers has been recognized as the bargaining agent since 1983.

At Newfoundland Hydro there are a variety of skills needed to get the job done. Some of these include technical skills, reading, writing and math skills, communication skills, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Hydro was a pioneer in designing in-house training programs in system operation, computer training, co-op programs as well as safety, health and other seminars to augment the existing educational system.

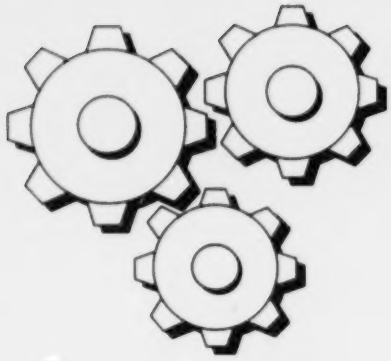
Human Resources Policy

In general, wages and benefits are competitive within the provincial labour market.

Pay equity and equal opportunity policies have been implemented as well as safety, training and performance appraisal programs.

Today, comprehensive benefits provide a high level of security and safeguard families against uncertainty. Together, these have resulted in a highly qualified and stable workforce.

At Newfoundland Hydro the introduction of new technology is one of the many changes facing employees and the changing work and community environment requires the corporation to provide in-house training. The introduction to new technology and training and the reorganization



of work are all strategies being employed to improve productivity. One such innovative strategy is a workplace education project where employees are given the opportunity to upgrade their basic skills in writing, math, reading and oral communications. This project is titled "Learning Initiatives for Tomorrow (LIFT)".

Program Description

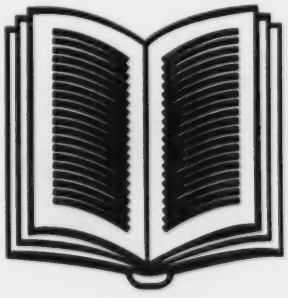
In April 1993, a workplace needs assessment was conducted at Newfoundland Hydro as the first step in creating a customized workplace education program. The program has been in operation for ten months. It is administered by an advisory committee which consists of two management and three union representatives. As a pilot project, two work sites were chosen for participation in the initiatives. At each site, a regional sub-committee of two management and two union members administers the program. A full-time project manager was retained to assist the regional sub-committees, conduct individual needs assessments, select and train local educational resources and market the program to potential participants. The training programs are primarily delivered by volunteer employee tutors although a part-time paid tutor at each site provided training in some specific programs.

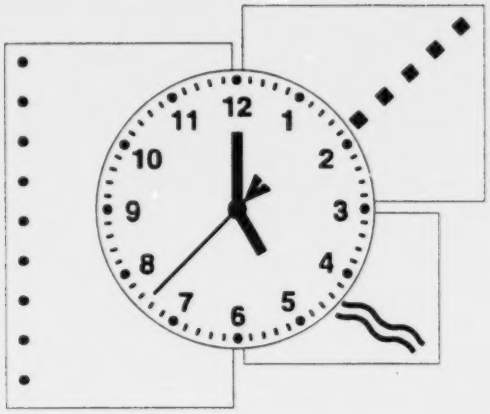
Services and Training Delivered

There are a variety of teaching methods used by the tutors in the basic skills program. Self-paced workbooks, computer based work and distance education are just a few of the methods used to deliver training.

The training takes place in both group oriented, interactive classrooms, as well as on a one-to-one basis with volunteer employee tutors.

Reading, writing, math, communications and high school equivalency qualifications are all taught at the program. Trainees are from all levels of within the organization. Classes meet on various days around the work schedule of the employees. There is flexibility in the number of classes per week, as well as the duration of the course. The learners meet on both company and employee time, on the worksite, or at a local community college, or sometimes in private homes. Due to the variety of program offerings, delivery methods and geographic locations, a full-time manager monitors the program. Participation is on a voluntary basis.





Thirty-six employees have participated in the program since it began with eighty percent of the participants being men around 40 years of age. All participants speak English as their first language and their educational backgrounds vary from some college or high school training to 8th grade or less. The National Literacy Secretariat and the provincial government were instrumental in providing demonstration funds for start-up.

Decision Making about the Program

Costs, location, unexpected delays and other start-up difficulties associated with the "geography" of the two pilot sites were all mentioned as difficulties encountered during the implementation process.

The organization found that identifying the training and learning needs of the workplace greatly helped in developing the program.

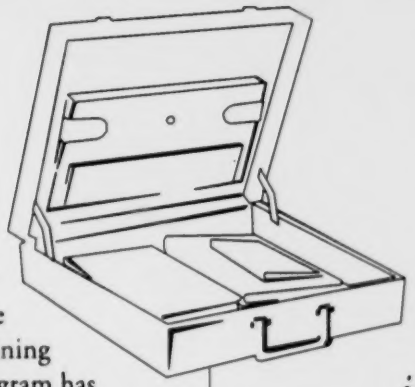
There were many significant factors that contributed to Hydro's decision to implement the program. Some of these factors included: the demand for increased health and safety practices, changes in the available workforce, the introduction of new technology, the need to reduce errors, work re-organization and changes in labour-management relations. The availability of a public subsidy was also a significant factor in the decision to implement the workplace education program.

There were arguments made in favour of the program by all employees, with increased productivity being at the top of the list. Information gathered from 112 employees at six company sites generated a report outlining a basic skills upgrading program and recommended strategies for implementation.

Although the program began as a joint union-company initiative, it has become an employee focused, self-development project. This change was a result of participants being empowered to make decisions about their training needs, methods of instruction and the curriculum content. In summary, decision making in the program by all participants was continually and actively encouraged.

Program Impacts

Although Newfoundland Hydro has not yet tried to measure the returns of the program to the company, there are plans to do a thorough evaluation. The current success rate of the program is connected to the following criteria: learners' evaluation of achieved learning objectives and completion of the required hours of class. The



corporation is planning to integrate components of the program into their regular training process. The impact of the program has been unanimously described as satisfactory by all of the participants in LIFT.

The top manager believes that the program is fulfilling its goals and expressed satisfaction with the content, the participants' learning goals, teaching methods, instructors and logistics. The supervisor believes that the workers are learning reading, writing, math skills, communication skills and co-operative team work. He also believes that the methods of instruction used in the program are so effective that they should be implemented in other types of company training.

The union representative also mentioned many positive program impacts including: the ability of the workers to read, communicate, compute and problem solve. He believes that the workers have increased their chances for promotion. Team work, work effort and the ability to work independently were also mentioned as program impacts, although it was stated that many employees already possess these attributes. Customer satisfaction was also an area mentioned, along with quality of output and the abilities of workers to use new technologies.

The program manager and the tutors both mentioned the worker's ability to read, communicate, compute and problem solve as positive program impacts. Time savings, error rates, improved worker safety and quality of output were also cited as observable changes.

The trainees indicated that the program had impacted their ability to use machinery and perform certain technical tasks, as well as to better communicate with other workers in a team approach.

They also mentioned that due to their increased confidence they felt more comfortable asking questions and working independently. The program also had a positive effect on their writing and organizational skills, as well as their attitude towards the company, their ability to advance at work, future career plans and family life.

Barriers to Implementation

As with all new projects, there were many different barriers to be addressed and resolved and this was the case with Newfoundland Hydro during the implementation of the program.

Management identified three obstacles that had to be hurdled before implementing the program.

The first of these was the cost of the program, particularly in release time. The second barrier was the possibility that workers might be resistant to basic skills remediation and the third was the belief that education is a public sector responsibility. With time each of these barriers was successfully crossed.

The program manager mentioned two major causes of concern during the implementation stage – the mismatch between worker needs and available training and initial worker resistance to a basic skills program. The union representative also felt that costs, the widespread and remote nature of the sites, unexpected delays, difficulty enrolling the first students, getting resource materials on time and co-ordinating participant training time were barriers that needed to be sorted out.

Trainees mentioned that the most significant barriers to implementing the workplace program were the issues related to whether the program

was really needed and the lack of information available to arrange for the basic skills training. As one respondent said "sometimes the sources of training even when they are available don't meet the employees' needs and they aren't quite sure what they would be getting from a basic skills training program".

Policy Influences

Some factors that would influence Newfoundland Hydro's decision to expand the program are the availability of support services, cost effectiveness and financial incentives. Local forums and employer networks where companies could talk about the contributions of such programs are needed. In Newfoundland Hydro, federal government assistance would also influence their decision to expand the program. Providing release time for employees to take part in a program funded outside the firm would also significantly influence the company's decision to expand.

Innovative Features of the Program

Workplace and individual needs assessments were considered paramount to the success of the program, as was the high level of support and co-operation from committee members, the union and the company. These assessments assisted in the development of the program. Employee input was actively encouraged, resulting in training which was responsive to the identified needs of the workers.

Another innovative feature was the "employee centred" focus of the program. All participants felt an ownership.

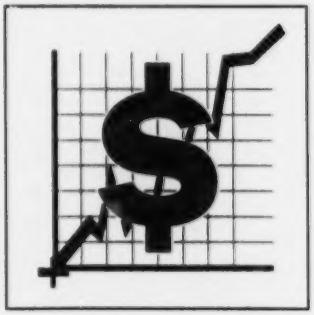
The willingness of employees to participate and volunteer to tutor their co-workers was also mentioned as a program feature that was noteworthy.

Lastly, the formation of regional sub-committees at each pilot site was an extremely effective method for program implementation. As one of the stakeholders said, "these sub-committees provided reliable insight into issues such as recruitment, program evaluation and training methodology. Sub-committee members collectively and individually possessed extensive knowledge and skills which were invaluable in dealing with problems and issues related to program implementation". In other words, ongoing consultation, along with continual co-operation were key features of the LIFT program.

Advice to Others Planning a Similiar Program

The advice offered by those involved in Newfoundland Hydro's workplace education program can be summarized by some of the following recommendations:

- ensure that a company completes a workplace needs assessment and listens and responds to the employees needs.
- do a thorough job on the promotional campaign.
- get support from all stakeholders in the company, union and employees.
- programs must be employee-centred and managers of the program must be responsive to input from employees. Avoid developing one general curriculum to fit everyone's training needs. Allow for individual differences and develop training programs based on the specific needs of each employee.
- utilize community resources such as tutors and trainers.
- organize one site project at a time.
- information presented to employees should be clear so that there is no misinterpretation of the objectives of the program.
- tutors should be well-informed and given the opportunity to discuss the various aspects of the program prior to their involvement.



Intertape Polymer Inc., Truro, Nova Scotia

Workplace Education Program

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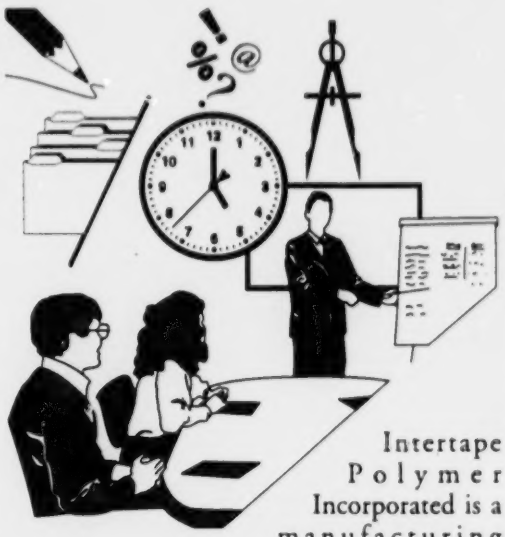
Workplace Education Program



Intertape Polymer Incorporated is a manufacturing company which produces textiles in Truro, Nova Scotia. Recently the company has experienced an increase in the size of their workforce as well as in sales and in profits. Before implementing their basic skills program in 1990, Intertape Polymer had not felt the need to offer such a service to their employees. The program in its present form is not a customized or tailor-made program in which a task analysis was conducted, but is a more generic type of upgrading program. In addition the company also offers various support services to the participants in the program.

The teaching methods used in the workplace education program are varied in nature. The learning takes place in a group-oriented environment, with self-paced modules which allow the participants flexibility and easy access to the one-to-one tutoring. The major subjects taught in the program are reading, writing and preparation for General Education Development (G.E.D.) certificate.

There were a number of factors behind the decision to implement the program such as: the demand for increased productivity, the need for improving processes and setting new standards, increased competition, health and safety practices and a timely promotion from a local literacy group.

The program has been helpful to all employees who participated, especially those with long service who needed to upgrade skills in order to compete for promotions. Other program impacts were the significant improvements in the employees' reading, writing, math, communication and problem-solving skills. The workers themselves also mentioned an increase in organizational skills and confidence in day-to-day work activities.

Uncertainty about what skills were needed, concerns over employees' resistance to basic skills training and cost of the program, particularly in release time, were some of the issues that required debate among the stakeholders before implementing the program.

One innovative feature of the program can be described as the "leadership" taken by the company. As one respondent explained, "the company was willing to take responsibility for identifying and educating their own workforce and not relying on someone else or some other agency to do it for them". Other innovative program features were the commitment of those who participated in the training, the strong communication within the program structures, the classroom culture and the sharing that occurred among the trainees.

Some of the advice that the participants of the Intertape Polymer group offer others interested in implementing a similar type of program include: work as a team to organize the project, have the company share in the cost of release time, make sure that all parties are discussing program delivery and design and that all stakeholders are involved from the beginning.

Intertape Polymer, Truro

Workplace Education Program

Company Background

Intertape Polymer Incorporated, a manufacturing company which produces textiles, employs approximately 350 workers at their main location in Truro, Nova Scotia. They also have 3 sister companies in Montreal, Louisana and Danville. All four of their sites run 12 hour shifts, with each location in continuous operation. The main customers of Intertape are large manufacturers. Since they are one of only a few suppliers they are in an international "niche" market. The company can best be described as a public corporation. Union representation exists solely at their Montreal location.

The demographics of the company workforce are very diverse. Eighty five percent of the employees are production people and labourers, with management, professional and clerical making up the additional 15 percent. Less than three percent of the production people are employed part time or seasonally. Sixty-two percent of the workforce are men and thirty-eight percent are women with the average age being 34. Aside from a few employees, everyone speaks English as their first language. The workforce is made up of mostly Caucasian workers, with several African Canadian employees and a small percentage of Native employees.

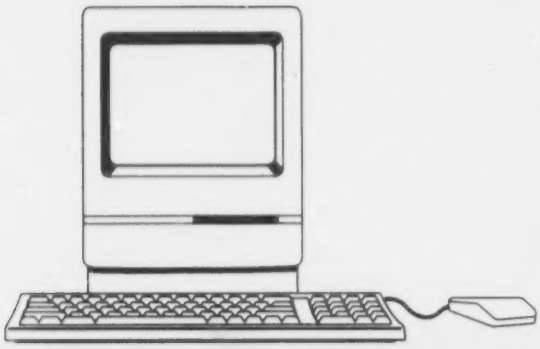
Management foresees several significant changes for the company over the next five years. They predict not only an increase in the size of the workforce, in sales and in profits, but also an expansion in the size of their market. These changes may, in turn, result in a need for the expansion of their training programs.

The company currently provides on-the-job training for technical skills, as well as basic training in reading, writing and math skills. The training needs correspond to worker needs such as problem solving skills, basic communication skills and technical skills. For example, some supervisors have found it necessary to spend extra time explaining procedures and requirements to workers.

Standard or formal evaluations are used by the company to measure performance of the individual workers.

Over the past few years there has been an improvement in productivity and performance which may be due to the changing skill level of the workers, the introduction of new technology and the setting of "targets and goals".

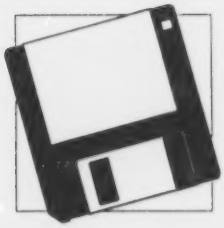
Overall, there has been about a one percent turnover rate in the company during the past year - mostly in part-time staff. Workers left predominantly because of transfers and layoffs.



Human Resources Policy

Two thirds of the employees at Intertape have been with the company from between five and twenty years. The company's training policy has been to upgrade existing staff so they can promote from within. There is an expectation that this training will promote loyalty and reduce turnover. Within the past five years, the company has had difficulty recruiting workers with the needed qualifications and skills. Those skills most frequently mentioned as being in short supply are English language skills, oral communication, reading, writing and math skills. As well, the company has had difficulty in recruiting workers who have an aptitude for manufacturing work.

With the continual introduction of new technology, increased competition for work and markets and changes in the organization of the workplace, it becomes more and more difficult to find workers with the types of transferable skills needed.



The company has responded to some of these challenges through initiatives such as the Industrial Training Program and consultancy work with the Human Resource Development Planning unit and the International Loss Control - Safety Rating System. They also continue to improve productivity through the use of new technology such as the ISO 900Z.

The company not only responds to skill shortages, but is also cognizant to human resource issues. For example, lack of promotion from within may be causing poor employee morale, particularly with all the growth and change in the work force. As well, worker/management relations and the number of layers of management are issues under review in the company.

Although absenteeism remains a problem, their policy regarding sick leave is more generous than average. The policy regarding vacation is about average and although the company's wages are similar to other employees in the area, they are higher than the overall wages in the local labour market. The company also offers: on-the-job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for "off-site" training, education and "in-house" seminars, health, life and disability insurance, pensions, profit sharing and parental leave.

Program Description

Prior to implementing their workplace education program in 1990, Intertape Polymer had not considered any basic skills programs. The initiative is not a customized or tailor-made program in

which a type of task analysis was conducted, but is a more generic type of program.

It is administered by the Human Resource manager, with no standing committee responsible for the program or person who acts as a liaison between the program participants and the program administrator. The program is currently being delivered by an outside education consultant who is paid through external funds.

The company also offers support services to the programs. Some of these include: a tuition reimbursement plan, one-to-one tutoring and counselling services. Although those who complete the program do not necessarily receive a bonus, raise, or promotion, one respondent explained, "several participants have completed the program and won positions, or were considered for promotions".

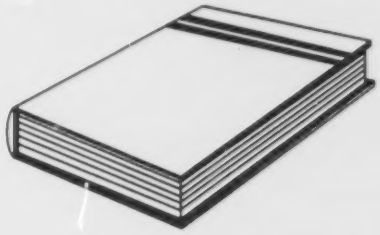
Services and Training Delivered

The teaching methods used in the workplace education program are varied in nature. There are self-paced workbooks which allow the participants the flexibility to work at their own pace along with the assistance of one-to-one tutoring when needed. The learning takes place in a group oriented environment.

The primary subjects taught in the program are reading, writing and General Education Development (G.E.D.) upgrading.

The program participants are predominantly production workers. The classes meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays and are scheduled an hour before and an hour after work. The work schedule is from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. Therefore classes are scheduled from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. - both on employer and employee time.

Classes meet twice a week for three months and as one respondent commented, a "comfortable training room" was added by the company in their 1990 expansion. There have been 46 participants in the G.E.D. program and 15 in the basic upgrading program. Ten participants with some high school education typically sign up each cycle, with about six to seven completing the cycle. There are about 10 people in each class, with twice as many male participants as female. Ages range from 25 to 40 years of age and the ethnic background of the participants is Caucasian. The cost for the program is approximately $375,000.



Decision Making about the Program

A local literacy group who sent the company very "timely" information about basic skills training was one of the catalysts in the eventual creation of the program.

Increased competition and health and safety practices also played a key role in the implementation of the program.

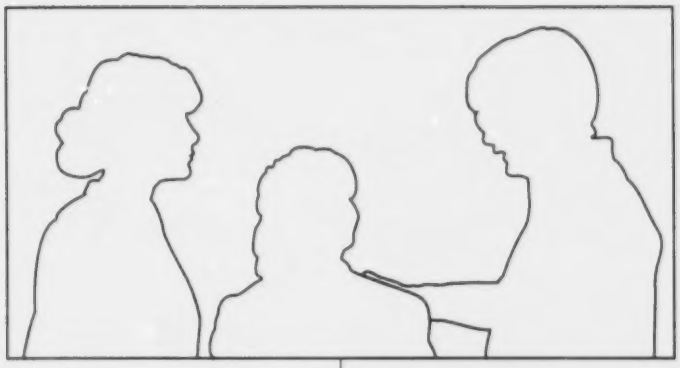
The availability of more grade 12 and university graduates in the labour market put pressure on the company to upgrade their own internal workforce and on the employees to work towards a grade 12 diploma in order to compete. As the decision to transform the work organization became apparent, the workers themselves identified the need for training and the company responded. As one supervisor explained, "the demand for increased productivity, of improving processes and setting new standards made us aware that some of our long time employees would not be able to cope or be promoted unless they upgraded their math and English skills".

In retrospect, the company now believes that identifying the training needs of the workplace and the learning needs of the workers would have assisted them in the development of their program. Input into much of the decision-making and design was solicited from both employees and supervisors, although some employees would have liked to have been more involved in the process. The employees view the program as a voluntary fringe benefit and see it as both a personal and job-related benefit.

Program Impacts

Although the company has not yet tried to measure the returns of the training on the shop floor, a present criteria for successful completion of the program is a passing grade on an exam. The use of tests and assessments for exit or completion are also being used. The program has been most helpful to employees with long service who need the skills upgrading to compete for promotions and is fulfilling its goals of giving those who want to be promotable a "chance".

The Human Resource manager evaluated all aspects of the program as satisfactory: the content, the participant learning gains, the participation, the teaching methods and the logistics. The supervisor also felt that the workers were improving their reading, writing and math skills.



In addition, employees were learning "how to" better communicate with each other and were developing stronger problem solving skills.

Both the workplace education co-ordinator and the instructor said that the program had had an impact on the ability of the workers to analyze reading materials, communicate, compute and problem solve. They also mentioned that the training had had a positive influence on the quality of worker interaction and worker safety. They both evaluated all aspects of the program as satisfactory.

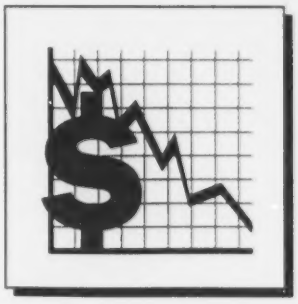
The workers stated that the program had helped them improve both their writing skills and organizational skills. They also mentioned the impact it had on their confidence in their day-to-day work, their ability to advance at work, their career plans, as well as their self-esteem. Several explained the program had even impacted positively on their family life. Both company morale and the possibility of advancement were significant impacts also mentioned. As one successful participant explained, "One G.E.D. grad was promoted to Trainer and this year was promoted to Department Coordinator".

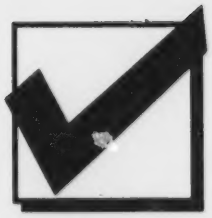
Barriers to Implementation

There were a significant number of reasons, already mentioned, for the company's decision to implement the program and very few barriers that were encountered along the way.

Management mentioned that not knowing exactly what skills their employees needed or whether employees would be resistant to basic skills training, were both barriers during the implementation process.

The trainees mentioned the cost of the program as being a barrier - particularly in release time.





Policy Influences

There are many different policies that would influence the company to expand their workplace education program.

Entry-level tests to certify that workers had the basic skills to work in the textile industry would strongly influence the company to expand its program.

These tests could also be used to identify and train workers with low competencies to achieve levels needed for certification. If the costs of the literacy training could be used to offset up to two percent of the company's contribution to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, then they would be in a better position to expand.

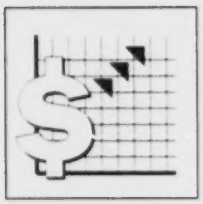
Other more moderate influences on the company's decision to expand the program include: employer sponsored training and education consortiums, a federal tax credit, renegotiating their benefit package to trade off the cost of such a program for spending on other fringe benefits, grants made available to reduce or eliminate the firms "out of pocket costs" and the reassurance that workers would remain with the firm long enough to recoup the investment in training.

Innovative Features of the Program

There were a multitude of factors that collectively contributed to the innovativeness of the program. One set of factors was related to the leadership of the company. As one respondent mentioned, "the company was willing to take responsibility for identifying and educating their own workforce and not relying on someone else or some other agency to do it for them".

Another innovative feature was the commitment of those who participated in the program. Connected to this commitment was the good communication within the program, the classroom culture and the sharing among trainees. The give-and-take between the company and the employees was also cited as an innovative feature of the program.

As one supervisor explained, "the commitment that was needed from the employees was pronounced and was one of the key reasons for the program's success".

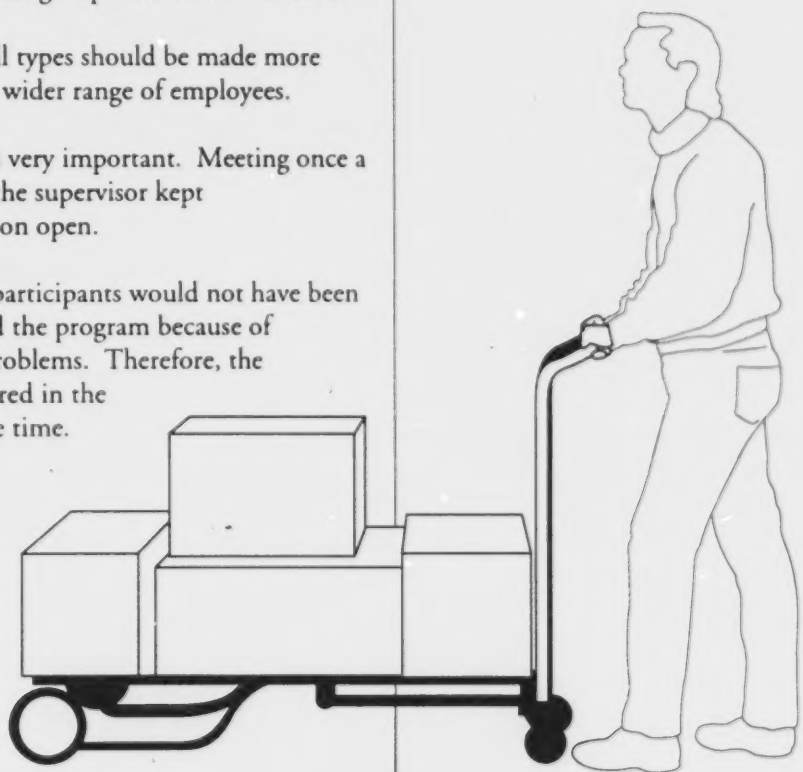


In addition, the company sharing in the operational costs, particularly through release time, made it easy for employees to attend the program. The availability of teachers before class time and the feeling that the company was encouraging the "empowerment of their employees" were two features particular to this workplace education program.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

Some of the advice that the participants from Intertape Polymer group have to offer include:

- Training of all types should be made more available to a wider range of employees.
- Team work is very important. Meeting once a month with the supervisor kept communication open.
- Some of the participants would not have been able to attend the program because of scheduling problems. Therefore, the company shared in the cost of release time.
- Have the service provider meet with all parties (together) to discuss program delivery and design.
- All stakeholders should be involved from the start.
- The service providers have to be seen as neutral parties, not someone hired by management to deliver a program that may not be wanted by labour.
- Look at what you need, see what is available and design the program around your needs.



Atlas Graham Industries Co., Ltd.

Workers' Education Training Program

Atlas Graham Industries Co., Ltd.

Workers' Education Training Program

Atlas Graham Industries Co. Ltd., founded in 1941 is a family-conscious, team-oriented, brush manufacturing and distributing company. The company has used quality circles, recruited more highly-skilled workers and added new technology in response to human resource issues. It has also directed much attention to the worker's ability to read, write, orally communicate and function as a team.

This is the third year that Atlas Graham Industries Co. has offered a training program. It is delivered by an outside services provider and has been described as "more general in nature" than job integrated. Reading, writing, spelling, mathematics and oral communication skills are taught in a group-oriented environment, twice a week, for one or two hours, for a period of four to six months. Eight people typically participate in each term, or cycle of the program.

The decision to implement the program was based on the company's desire to increase worker satisfaction and to improve communication at the workplace. Although the company has decided against measuring the returns of the program, formal and informal evaluations have been conducted by the participants on the teaching component of the program.

In general, all stakeholders are satisfied with the content, learning gains, teaching methods and logistics. The program also impacted personally on the employees self-esteem, family life and overall confidence. An interesting example of the employees' learning process was their decision to print some of their own articles and stories in a learner's newspaper. This was not only to help improve their writing skills but as they explained, "It may help other learners to learn".

The program encountered several barriers during the implementation process. Some of these concerns centered around the uncertainty about whether the program was needed and if it was, how to respond to the problem. The question of "whose" responsibility was it to upgrade the employees' basic skills was also a concern that had to be addressed.

There are numerous innovative features that have been attributed to the program's success. For example, the quality of the instructor, the commitment of the students and management's willingness at all levels to initiate and support the program were significant factors. The tailor-made curriculum and the coordination and policy development at the provincial government level also aided in its success, as did the demonstration project money from the National Literacy Secretariat.

The advice offered by the participants to others planning a similar program can be summarized by several of the following key responses: strive for a "partnership model" between management, instructor and the workforce who should keep abreast of current issues, maintain a broad attitude towards learning, implement a curriculum driven by participants, make the program voluntary and flexible and recruit committed individuals.

Atlas Graham Industries Co., Ltd.

Workers' Education Training Program

Company Background

Atlas Graham Industries Co., Ltd., formerly named Atlas Brush, was founded in 1941 by James Davis Graham in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Through the leadership of Mr. Graham's son Joe, Atlas has evolved into a team-oriented, profit-sharing, family-conscious manufacturer and distributor. The move from an old, multi-storey building to a newer, 60,000 square foot building, combined with the most modern mop and brush making equipment available, assisted the company's expansion into international markets.

Atlas currently employs 40 workers with 50% being machine operators. There are 19 men and 21 women presently employed whose ages range from 20 to 55. Sixteen of these employees speak English as a second language. Three speak German, one person speaks Italian and the remaining 12 speak Portuguese. Approximately five percent of the workforce are Native Peoples. According to one supervisor, the skills needed to perform the work at Atlas Graham include everything from reading, writing and math skills - to communication, cooperation and problem-solving skills.

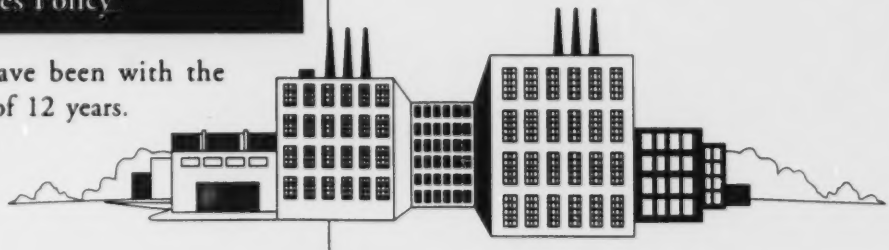
Human Resources Policy

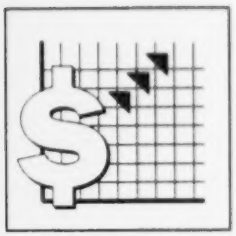
Most employees have been with the company in excess of 12 years. There has been a reduction in staff from 52 employees to 40 since the beginning of 1990. However, with sales expanding there are now seven part-time employees.

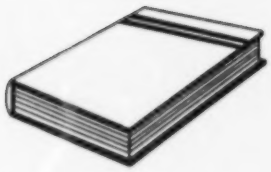
Although the company has neither a "career ladder" within the organization nor a pool of skilled workers ready for advancement, jobs above entry level are usually filled internally, as priority is always given to current employees. The company, however, does have some employees whose skills are too low to make them promotable.

The company's policy regarding sick leave and concerning lateness is more than lenient. Their policy regarding vacation pay is about average and wages are higher than similar employees in the local market and in the region. The company offers on-the-job training, tuition assistance and in-house seminars. They also offer fringe benefits such as: health, life and disability insurance, pensions and profit-sharing.

There is a general belief in the firm that schools have failed to prepare people for work so the company must. They hire people at wages "above their value" and then train them to levels of performance that will make them "worth their wages". Since they promote from within, training







is often required which in turn tends to promote greater employee loyalty and reduces turnover.

Presently the human resources issues at the firm include: labour costs, productivity, waste of material and the ability of the workers to read, write, orally communicate and function as a team.

The company employs several different strategies to cope with these human resources issues, such as training, the use of sub-contractors and temporary agencies. They have also attempted to improve productivity through the use of quality circles, the recruitment of more highly skilled workers and the use of new technology.

Program Description

This is the third year that Atlas Graham Industries Co. Ltd.'s workplace education program has been in place. The program is described as being more general in nature than job integrated and was entirely customized for the company. It is administered by the Chief Executive Officer and a standing committee, which is made up of top management, supervisors and program participants. There is also someone who acts as a liaison between the program participants and the program administrator or firm management. The program services are delivered by an outside delivery agency.

To assist trainees, the company has introduced a tuition reimbursement plan along with tutoring support services. Wages are not raised after training is completed and the program is not viewed as a fringe benefit.

Services and Training Delivered

The workplace education program is delivered in a group-oriented environment using a variety of teaching methods.

Reading, writing, spelling, mathematics and oral communications skills are currently being taught to predominantly production people.

Classes meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, immediately after work, for one to two hours. The duration of the course is from four to six months. Participants are scheduled for their course on both employee and company time at the work site and trainees volunteer to participate in the program.

Twenty-three people have completed the program since its inception. Eight people typically participate each term or cycle of the program. There are usually a higher percentage of women

than men trainees, who range in age from 28 to 51. All of the participants speak English as their second language. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants are usually Caucasian, Portuguese and Filipino. Participants have some high school, or grade 8 or less. The total cost of the program is $13,000.00 a year.

Decision Making about the Program

The major factors in the decision to implement the company's basic skills program were predominantly to increase worker satisfaction and to improve communication at the workplace.

The introduction of new technology and access to subsidized training by an outside public source also had an influence. The firm's decision to offer a higher quality of product and improve customer relations were factors which contributed to the decision to implement the program. The company's shift to a more progressive attitude towards labour-management relations was also mentioned as a reason along with responding to increased health and safety practices imposed by the government.

Certain decisions were also made during the implementation process which were problematic — decisions such as costs, location and difficulty enrolling the first students. The company indicated that if they had identified the learning needs of the workers, recruited participants and secured funds to support the program in advance, these problems most likely would not have occurred.

Program Impacts

The company has not yet measured the returns of the program and has no plans to do so. However, formal and informal evaluations have been done by participants on the teaching component of the program. The instructor evaluations are used to measure the educational gains of the program participants. A criteria for successful completion in the program is completing the required hours of class attendance. The current completion rate of the program is roughly 90 to 100 percent. Information regarding a participant's success is shared on an individual basis and confidentiality is assured.

The manager of the company expressed satisfaction with the following: program content, participant learning gains, teaching methods and the logistics. However, he would like to see an increase in the number of students participating in each class.

The supervisor, instructor and education specialist rated the following program impacts as significant:

the ability of the workers to read, to communicate, problem-solve and work independently, increases in company loyalty, morale, teamwork, customer satisfaction and the quality of output. The supervisor who knows the cost of the program to the company stated that, "It's well worth it".

The employees indicated that many areas of their lives had been affected by the program. For example, at work they noticed an increased ability to communicate with other workers by asking and understanding questions, an increased ability to work independently and an increased ability in writing and organizing their time. They also indicated that "speaking with more confidence and recognizing that other workers may need help" were indirect, but highly significant program impacts.

As well, the program has had a positive impact on their confidence in job tasks, their satisfaction with work and as a result, an improved attitude towards the company. The program has also impacted their self-esteem, their family life and their overall self-confidence. As one participant explained, "We all learn from each other — including the instructor".

An interesting example of this learning process is the employee's decision to print some of their own articles and stories in a learners' newspaper. This not only helped them to improve the writing skills of spelling, grammar and punctuation, but as they explained, "It may help other learners to learn". One of their more current publications is entitled "*Great Stories from the Great People of Atlas Graham*".

Barriers to Implementation

As with any new training program, management mentioned several barriers that were encountered and solved in the process of implementing their initiative.

> *At first, they had never considered the issue of basic skills training; therefore, they were not sure whether such a program was needed.*

Although the company suspected there might be a problem, they were unaware of any solutions and did not know how to arrange for basic skills training. Their uncertainty about what they would be getting from basic skills training also made them question whether it would cost too much, particularly in release time. Management was also concerned that workers would be resistant to literacy and language remediation.

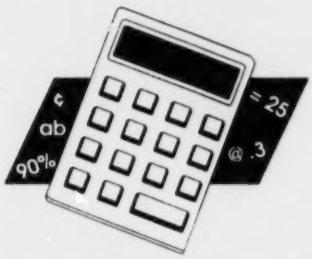
It was also mentioned that often companies are not aware of "how to" package basic skills training with other in-house training. Sometimes companies feel it is too difficult to get the returns of their investment because of high employee turnover. As well, some firms believe education is a public sector responsibility and the workers are responsible for solving their own problems. However, in this case the barriers that were crossed exemplifies the company's commitment in responding to the workplace literacy issue.

The trainees mentioned that personal activities outside of work, lack of day care and the embarrassment attached to attending literacy classes were the most significant barriers, not necessarily to the program but as barriers which prevented others from enrolling.

Policy influences

The manager believes the company would be more likely to expand the program if tests were developed by employer organizations, the government, or schools to certify that the workers have the basic skills to work in the industry.

Another strong influence on the company's decision to expand would be if a local community college, school, or other agency offered to design, implement



and provide a basic skills program for their employees.

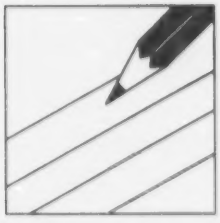
A federal tax credit, or offsetting the costs of training up to two percent of the company's contributions to the Unemployment Insurance Fund would also strongly influence the company's decision. A 20 percent U.I. reduction would also influence the organization's decision as well as the renegotiation of their benefit package to trade off the cost of program expenses.

Some of the more moderate policy influences include: evidence from the firm indicating that basic skills training pays for itself through increased job performance and productivity, availability of technical service particularly if it were provided by the provincial government and an employer-sponsored training and education consortium.

Innovative Program Features

There are numerous features of the program at Atlas Graham that contributed to it's success. The quality of the instructor who has been teaching in the program for three years, the commitment of the students, the available and comfortable on-site facilities and management's willingness at all levels to initiate and support the program were the features most frequently cited by participants.

The tailor-made curriculum which reflected many of the



company's concerns and issues was also an innovative feature of the program.

"The project team, with their co-involvement with all the stakeholders" as mentioned by the workplace co-ordinator reflected the cooperative participation experienced in the project. The commitment of the participants, their resourcefulness and ability to work independently were other positive features of the program. Some of the words that were used to describe the attributes of the trainees were enthusiastic, motivated and committed and characteristics of the instructor - talented, resourceful and committed.

The coordination and policy development at the provincial government level aided in the quality of partnership between stakeholders and the participants of the program. The available federal dollars to support various aspects of the program was also mentioned as an important component along with the continuity and momentum that was created by all those involved.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

When asked, "If a similar company wanted to set up a workplace education program like this one, what advice would you give?", the responses can be summarized as follows:

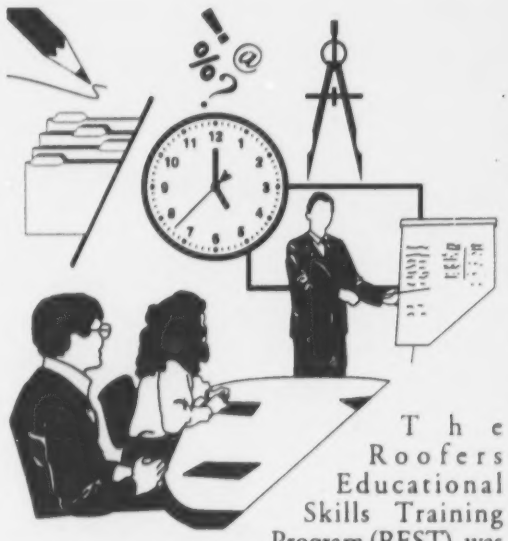
- ensure that the company representative assigned to be involved in the project is kept aware of what is going on so that they are able to support the program when problems arise.
- ensure support from all levels of management.
- make sure that supervisors are aware of time they are going to lose to allow participation in the program.
- strive for a "partnership model" between management, instructor, workforce.
- committed committees.
- program must be viewed as being of value regardless of the level of the student.
- curriculum driven by participants.
- voluntary participation.
- the instructor must be experienced in adult education practices and be flexible.
- secure appropriate on-site facilities that are available on a consistent basis.
- maintain a very broad attitude towards learning.
- remember, it benefits employer and employee.
- demonstrate to other employees that management encourages participation.

The Alberta Roofing Contractors Association

Roofers Educational Skills Training Program

The Alberta Roofing Contractors Association

Roofers Educational Skills Training Program



The Roofers Educational Skills Training Program (REST), was primarily developed for employees in many small roofing companies who could not afford individual up-grading programs. The funding was received from provincial and federal sources and from the Alberta Roofing Contractors Association. This funding allowed employees, predominantly industrial and commercial roofing contractors, the opportunity to develop literacy skills needed to perform their jobs. It also assisted them to keep up with the technological changes within the roofing industry. REST was developed and delivered by Alberta Vocational College, Edmonton for the Alberta Roofing Contractors Association.

The project was initiated for many reasons. It was implemented in response to safety concerns, a growing industry demand for increased educational standards, a changing work environment and new trends in the roofing industry.

Training for roofers is usually very job related, often dealing with new roofing systems, updating new technical skills, first aid, WHIMIS, safety seminars and toolbox meetings. By implementing a drop-in learning centre approach, the program was able to respond to the diversity of their training needs. It was also able to conform to the changing work hours of the roofers. These factors collectively made it possible for a number of different companies to access training.

Since its inception, 25 people have participated in the program. The most significant impact the program has had on the participants is increased self-esteem and self-confidence. Some individuals applied to other training while others applied for higher positions and moved internally within the same occupational field. Employees improved their academic skill levels, communication skills, dealing with others and work attitudes. They also increased their knowledge of workplace safety.

Better access to program information and a more comprehensive involvement of the employees in the program would have eliminated some of the resistance to participation. Due to the actual logistical problems roofers experience when trying to attend a program, such as: irregular hours, jobs taking them out of town and being part of a required team, created a barrier to participation.

One program feature worthy of mention was the personalities that gave leadership– for example, the roofing inspector and project staff whose strong commitment, vision, time and energy assisted in the evolution of the project, from its conception to its implementation. Another innovative feature was the participatory approach implemented through the Employee Development Committee, whereby employees were actually involved in planning their program. This ensured that the content suited the identified needs of the participants.

Some of the advice that has been offered to those wishing to embark on implementing a program can be summarized as follows: establish an advisory committee, carefully select the instructor, secure the commitment of all stakeholders, engage the services of a qualified institute to perform a needs assessment, pool resources, establish flexibility and secure a key individual to spearhead the project.

The Alberta Roofing Contractors Association

Roofers Educational Skills Training Program

Background Information

The Roofers Educational Skills Training (REST) program was developed for related small businesses who operate in a common market and who lack the revenue base and resources to support a literacy skills upgrading program. This pilot literacy project was developed and delivered by Alberta Vocational College, Edmonton for the Alberta Roofing Contractors Association (ARCA). Employers within the roofing trade, through the Roofing Industry Training Association of Alberta could provide the funding support for relevant and appropriate skills development for roofing employees.

Employees interviewed for this case study worked primarily for industrial and commercial roofing contractors who were members of ARCA. They were frequently involved in seasonal work, were quite mobile and typically were members of a five to six person crew who specialized in roofing systems and installations. Each person was a required member of the crew and unable to be replaced when attending classes. In peak periods, a long work day would often necessitate employees working late into evening.

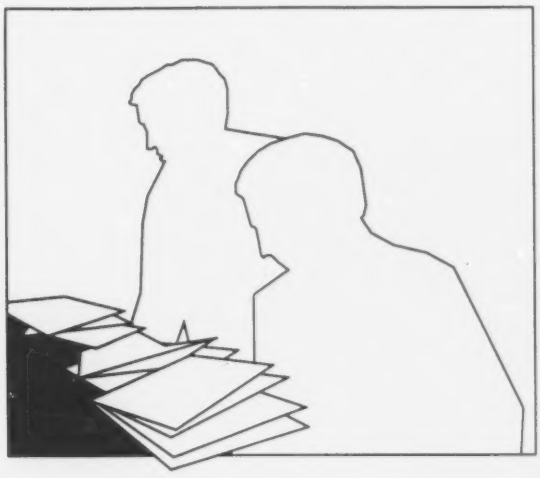
The REST Project was initiated in response to safety concerns, a growing industry demand for increased educational standards, a changing work environment, new trends in the roofing industry and the need for providing basic skills training in the workplace to roofing employees.

Human Resources Policy

Within the roofing industry, a high turnover exists within the labourer sector, with the average length of stay at a company not exceeding more than two years. Normally jobs above entry level are filled internally. Most companies offer good benefits for their permanent employees including health, life and disability insurance, vacation time and tuition reimbursement. Training for roofers is job related often dealing with new roofing systems, the updating of new technical skills, first aid, WHIMIS and safety seminars and tool box meetings.

Program Description

One of the major goals of this literacy program was to develop a model of delivery which would allow employees from many small roofing companies to access training without interruption to their work schedules. It was also anticipated that this model could be used with other sectors. An additional goal was to provide employees with the opportunity to develop literacy skills needed



to perform their jobs and keep up with the technological changes within the roofing industry.

An Employee Development Committee consisting of roofers, the roofing inspector and the instructor was set up to ensure that the program suited the employees and met their needs. A workplace focus was maintained by having input from the roofing apprenticeship program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

Management, supervisors and employees were consulted in establishing the goals for the program.

The content of the program was based on objectives derived from the needs assessments. These were to facilitate the development of basic skills, to enhance communication and interpersonal skills, to increase participant self confidence, to improve personal management skills and to develop an attitude of lifelong learning. In the pilot project, funding was received from provincial and federal sources and from the Alberta Roofing Contractor Association (ARCA). In the course subsequent to the pilot, the ARCA provided the operational funds.

Services and Training Delivered

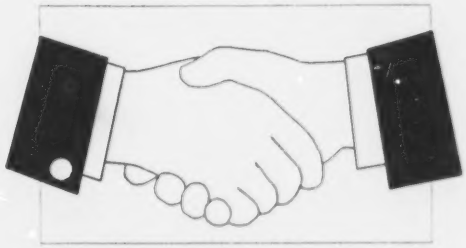
The model of delivery selected by the instructor and the Employee Development Committee utilized a drop-in learning centre approach.

The program was able to respond to the diversity in learning focus and interests of the learners as well as to conform to the changing work hours of the roofers.

By implementing this model, employees from a number of different companies were able to access training.

One hundred hours of instruction were offered over a 15 week period to the 18 learners who volunteered for the first REST program. A subsequent REST program, begun in the winter, has recessed for the summer and will start up in the fall.

The program is administered by Alberta Vocational College in Edmonton. Instructors use a variety of teaching methods with a program of study consisting of reading, writing, mathematics, interpersonal skills, money management, computer literacy skills and communication skills.



Classes meet twice a week after work in the evenings. They are normally two to four hours in duration. Employees are taught at Alberta Vocational College on employee time. Class size does not exceed 20. Since its inception, 25 people have participated in the REST program. They are all men, mostly technicians and labourers, with an age range of 22 to 45.

The total cost of the program is $10,000.00 outside of the initial needs assessment, curriculum design and pilot delivery. This is absorbed by the Alberta Roofing Contractors Association. Evaluation in the form of a final report by the instructor and an external evaluation by Keyano College indicated that the program was highly successful. Participants also had an opportunity to evaluate the program.

Decision Making About the Program

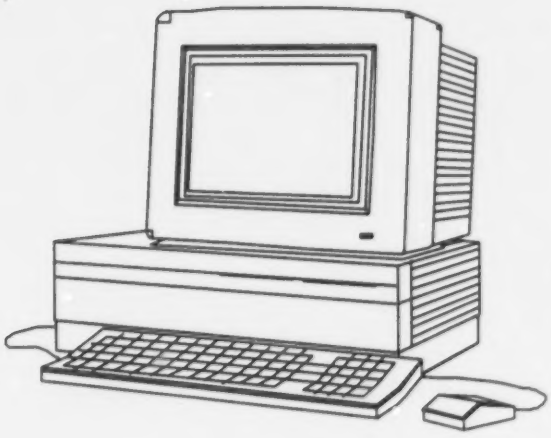
The process that triggered the implementation of the REST program was begun by an employer who was in contact with a government workplace language manager who spoke about the needs and benefits of workplace literacy training for roofers. The process of generating interest and building commitment on the part of employers and employees took a number of years. From the REST program it was learned that project coordinators and partners require adequate lead in time to start a workplace education program and employees need notification well in advance of program start up through the use of posters and flyers and face to face contact with champions, employers and employees. Recruitment and assessment were critical elements in setting the stage for effective program results. The striking of an Employee Development Committee ensured the needs of the roofers were being met.

Program Impacts

The major impact of the REST program was the increased self esteem and self confidence experienced by all the participants.

Some individuals applied to other training programs while others applied for higher positions and moved internally within the same occupational field. A few took up work in other trades or occupations. Participants were more comfortable with computer technology due to the computer literacy component of the program.

An unanticipated impact of the program was a new interest in topics that had not been part of the employees post educational experience such



as personal development issues involving communication skills, dealing with others and work attitudes.

Employees improved their academic skill levels and by the end of the program they had gained confidence in their ability to learn after a long absence from the classroom. They demonstrated a positive attitudinal change regarding lifelong learning and the ability to succeed. They also increased their knowledge of workplace safety.

Barriers to Implementation

Better access to information about the program could have been present as well as more comprehensive involvement of the employers at the outset of the program and throughout its evolution.

The work reality for many of the roofing employees is that their jobs take them out of town, they are part of a required team and they work irregular hours. All these factors impact the scheduling of the workplace class and dictate that the time frame be flexible with both open entry and open exit.

Other barriers involved the attitude of some employees, employers and stakeholders toward the issue of literacy.

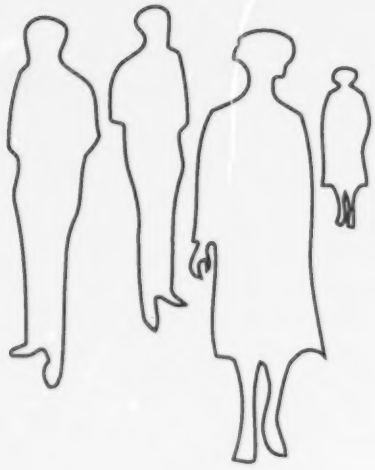
Some employers do not have a good understanding of the effects and benefits of workplace literacy and thus don't believe basic skills training will be very effective.

Employers often don't know what skills are needed for productive job performance and are very busy trying to survive economically. Workplace literacy is not a high priority with them.

Some workers are resistant to learning, are afraid to reveal their literacy difficulties and feel they don't need it for their jobs. This existing attitude impacts greatly the recruitment of potential volunteers for a workplace education program such as REST.

Policy Influences

All stakeholders expressed the desire that everyone in the industry should be more aware of the need for workplace education programs. Employers of companies need to be more cognizant of the issues and benefits of workplace programs and be part of a network promoting program successes and impacts to all levels, particularly to the employee



base. There should be more partnering between business and government. Government could play a greater role in policy development by facilitating incentives to small businesses through tax breaks and U.I. reductions.

Employees are seeking more support and encouragement from their employers for their academic development. This would aid them in establishing a more positive self identity.

Coalition building and collaborative efforts among many partners is at the heart of the issue of human resources development.

Innovative Program Features

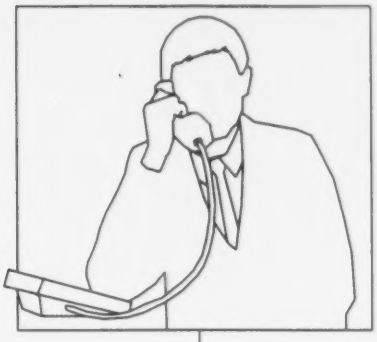
The success of the program rests in part with the individual personalities who possessed strong commitment and vision and who invested much time and energy to the project. The champions

who emerged in the evolution of this project from its genesis through to its completion were the roofing inspector and the project staff of the hosting educational institution.

In addition to the provision of adequate funding for the project, there also existed a network of strong support and continual cooperation by all program partners – the roofing industry, the participating educational institutions and the government.

Other innovative features lay with the participatory approach implemented through the Employee Development Committee, whereby employees were actually involved in planning their program thus ensuring that the content suited the identified needs of the participants. It was important that the instructor possess the appropriate skills and personality to deliver this kind of program.

Offering a broader more holistic program of study including reading, writing, numeracy, interpersonal skills, personal development, safety and health, computer literacy and computer assisted learning were powerful contributors to the success of the program.



Included in this holistic approach was content developed with a clear workplace focus and a variety of teaching modes to accommodate learning styles, learning needs and learning focus.

Other features included voluntary registration to the program, accommodative scheduling that was sensitive to the working time frame of participating employees and re-entry into a learning environment that subscribed to employee participation in a familiar atmosphere with familiar content and with working peers.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

The following advice has been offered to those wishing to embark on setting up a workplace education program:

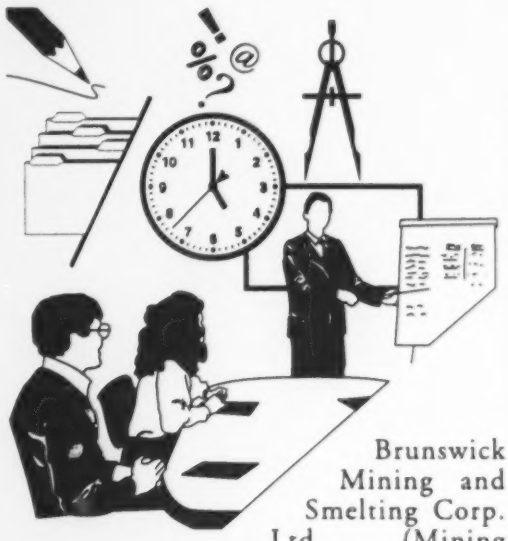
- Establish an advisory committee at the outset.
- Select the instructor carefully and someone who demonstrates flexibility and compassion to the cause.
- Secure the commitment of all stakeholders.
- Engage the services of a qualified educational institution in performing needs assessments.
- Pool resources and use outside experts if necessary.
- Secure a sound funding base.
- Recruit participants thoroughly and with sensitivity.
- Listen to the needs and goals of the participants.
- Involve the participants as much as possible in designing their learning.
- Maintain open communication at all times between all involved parties.
- Establish a flexible program delivery.
- Secure a key individual who can spearhead the project.

Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd.

Workplace Education Program

Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd.

Workplace Education Program



Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd. (Mining Division) employs over one thousand people at their mining site. Essential basic skills required of most of the labourers are reading, writing and math skills, communication skills and team-work skills.

Both the introduction of new technology and increased worker satisfaction were central to the decision to implement the program. Another reason why more attention has been given to the company's training program is that there is a very stable workforce at Brunswick Mining. The company believes to maintain the stability of their "internal market" they must continue to upgrade their existing staff. This, in turn, also promotes company loyalty.

The workplace education program was introduced five years ago. Over 150 people have participated in the program since its inception. It is an entirely customized, original program that could best be described as more general in nature, than job related. The teaching methods used to deliver the program are also varied such as self-paced modules, one-to-one tutorials and also some group-oriented tasks.

Input was solicited from employees and supervisors about the design of the program. The fact that workers identified the need for training was definitely one of the most important factors. As one instructor explained, "these skills are necessary in today's workplace because of the higher education standards being implemented in our industry".

In terms of impacts, generally speaking, satisfaction was expressed with regards to the content of the program and the learning gains. The employees ability to read, compute and communicate was also frequently mentioned as areas where the participants exhibited task mastery.

There were only a few barriers that Brunswick Mining and Smelting encountered during the implementation process. The key concerns raised during this time were: how to design a program, what exactly they would be getting from basic skills training and what skills did their employees need. Hard work and combined experience assisted the company to both answer and overcome these barriers.

There were a multitude of program features contributing to the success of Brunswick Mining and Smelting's workplace education program. Features such as maintaining confidentiality, extensive promotion of the program and the actual structure of the program were all mentioned as successful attributes of their program. Participants being allowed to work at their own pace with tutors and a well known and trusted instructor were also essential components of the program. Finally, a partnership between union and management was considered key to program operations.

Some of the advice offered by the participants can be summarized by the following statements: communication is key to successful program implementation, confidentiality is essential, working at your pace encourages self motivation and most importantly, the program must be supported by both union and management.

Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd.

Workplace Education Program

Company Background

Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd. employs over one thousand people at their mining site. They are one of the few suppliers who serve customers in both national and international markets. The corporation is represented by a union that was established in 1964 and the majority of employees are technical and production people. Ninety-nine percent of the workforce are men, whose ages range from 25 to 64. Sixty percent of the workers speak French as their first language. Ninety-nine percent of the workforce are native to Canada.

The kinds of skills required to do the work at New Brunswick Mining include both technical skills and the basic skills of reading, writing and math skills, communication skills, team-work and problem-solving skills.

Several significant changes are foreseen at the company in the next five years such as a reduction in the size of the workforce, a decline in sales and in the size of its markets. These changes will precipitate a need for expanding training programs.

Human Resources Policy

With the yearly turnover rate decreasing, Brunswick Mining has a very stable workforce.

The general attitude of the firm at this time is that schools have failed to educate people - so they must.

They also believe that they have an internal resource market, which means that to achieve any productivity gains, they must upgrade existing staff. There is also a belief that promoting from within will require more training but that training promotes company loyalty.

With the introduction of new technology and the firm's desire to improve customer relations, as well as to shift to a stronger commitment towards labour-management relations, the firm has decided to expand their training programs and later reorganize their work structures. Increasing competition and the mass retirement of workers are current issues faced by the Human Resources Department.

The most serious human resources issues however have been a waste of material followed by concerns over: recruiting and hiring qualified workers, not enough promotion from within, labour costs, too many layers of management, the workers' ability to read, write and solve math problems and finally, customer relations.

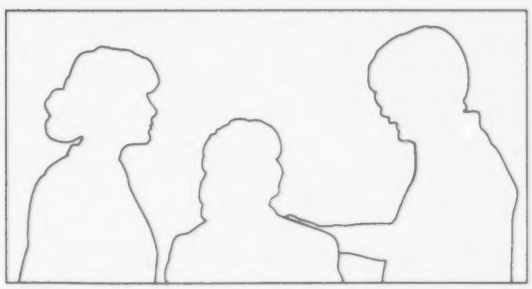
When jobs above entry level are available, they are occasionally filled internally. The company has a policy which defines the career ladder within

the organization and a small pool of skilled workers ready for advancement.

Training often follows promotions and promotions often follow training.

The company has a more generous than average policy regarding sick leave and vacation pay. They also have a lenient policy regarding lateness. Absenteeism is an issue the company has attempted to minimize. Brunswick Mining offers on-the-job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off-site training or education and in-house seminars. The nature of this training and education has changed considerably in recent years.

The company's wages are higher than those of similar employees in the area and in the local labour market and it offers an extensive fringe benefit package as well. These include: health, life and disability insurance, pensions, profit sharing, vacation and parental leave and tuition reimbursement.



Program Description

This workplace education program has been in place for five years.

It is an entirely customized, original program that has both general and job related components.

It is administered by a training co-ordinator and union officials. There is also a standing committee consisting of a human resource manager, a union representative and an employee representative. As well, there is someone who serves as a liaison between the program participants and the program administrators. The services are delivered by an instructor inside the firm. The company also offers a tuition reimbursement plan and counselling services. The program itself is not viewed as a fringe benefit but as a welcomed response to the changing market.

Services and Training Delivered

There are several teaching methods used to deliver the services in the program. There are self-paced modules, one-to-one tutorial sessions and also some group-oriented methods.

Reading and writing are taught twice a week to the various types of employees either during the work day or after work. These voluntary classes

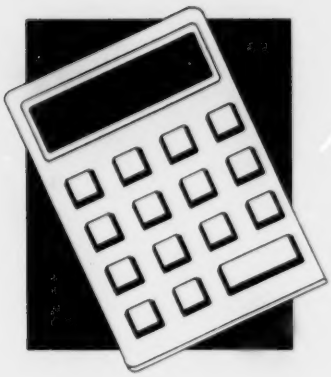
are from two to four hours and are scheduled on both company and employee time, either on, or away from the work site. The duration, or term length of the course is, as one respondent explained, "until the employees feel trained to tackle old tasks in a better way or try out new tasks".

Over 150 people have participated in the workplace education program since its inception. Seventy-six people are currently in the program, with 35 to 40 people typically participating in each term or cycle. There are usually 10 to 20 men per class, between the ages of 40 to 50. Participants usually have some high school or grade 8 or less.

Decision Making about the Program

The introduction of new technology and increased worker satisfaction were two of the major factors in the company's decision to implement the program.

Changes in production methods, increased health and safety practices, the need to reduce waste and changes in labour-management relations were also extremely important factors in the decision to implement the program.



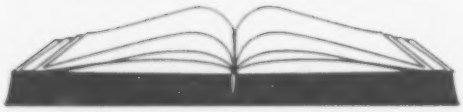
Workers themselves identified the need for training. The basic skills are "necessary in today's workplace because of the demand for higher education standards in our business", explained the instructor, who spoke with both management and the employees about their goals for the program.

There were some start-up difficulties that could have been minimized if the company had been able to more readily identify the specific training needs of the workforce and of the individual workers. However, input was solicited from employees and supervisors about the decision-making and design of the program.

All of the various employees argued in favour of the program - with a productivity-related approach being one of the key thrusts. The only argument against the program was from a supervisory perspective, due to the logistics of staff absences during training. The company funds both their own start-up and operating costs.

Program Impacts

One of the criteria for successful completion of the program is the demonstration of task mastery. As with most programs, this one has been evolving over the past five years and a new program has slowly emerged. The focus in on life long learning and it is therefore too early to have "graduates".



The company is planning to continue as well as expand the service.

Opinions about the program impact were varied. For example, the manager is satisfied with the content of the program but is concerned with the level of participation, the service provider and the logistics. He stated that the program is not worth its cost to the company - or that it should be expanded. He also rated the ability of the employees to communicate and increased morale, as being only moderate program impacts.

On the other hand, although the education specialist was dissatisfied with the logistics, he believed that the content, learning gains and participation levels were satisfactory. The instructor was also satisfied with the content, participant learning gains and teaching methods, but was not satisfied with the level of participation.

Both stakeholders agreed that the workers' ability to read, compute, problem solve and communicate were skills that increased as a result of the program.

They also agreed that morale, quality of worker interaction and the ability for employees to work independently were significantly improved. Time savings and the ability to use new technologies were other positive program impacts.

The union representative was satisfied with all of the aspects of the program and the employees interviewed really connected to the teaching methodology, but stated that they were dissatisfied with the logistics. Both the union representative and the employees agreed that their ability to read, compute and communicate had improved, as well as the quality of worker interaction and their ability to work independently. They stated that their work effort had increased and that company time savings had been positively affected. They also rated worker safety as a program impact.

Barriers to Implementation

There were many reasons that Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corp. Ltd. (Mining Division) decided to implement their workplace education program and only a few barriers that they encountered during the process. The barriers mentioned by management were location and not knowing "how to" go about designing a program or whether it was needed. They were also unsure as to what they would be getting from a basic skills training approach and what skills their employees really needed. However, all of these initial problems were subsequently overcome. Hard work and accumulated experience combined to eliminate these barriers.

Policy Influences

The manager believes that the company would be more likely to expand a workplace education program if a generic approach to the curriculum

was used as opposed to a more job integrated course content.

He believes other strong influences would be: local forums or networks established which would allow the company to talk with other employers about the contributions and challenges their programs have had, available technical assistance provided by the federal government and finally, a local community college, school or other agency that offers to design, implement and provide a basic skills program.

Some of the more moderate influences would be: evidence from other firms indicating that basic skills training pays for itself through increased job performance and productivity and tests developed by employer organizations, the government or schools to certify that workers have the basic skills required to work in the industry.

The company's interest would be negatively affected if they were asked to provide paid release time for employees to take part in a program funded outside of the firm. An employer-sponsored training and education consortium would have a moderate influence on the company's decision to expland. Federal tax credits, or off-setting the cost of training by up to two percent of the company's contribution to the

Unemployment Insurance Fund would also increase the likelihood to expand the program. A larger U.I. reduction would have an even greater influence on program expanding decisions.

If employees agreed to contribute a percentage of their salary to a workplace training and education fund, or grants were readily available to reduce or eliminate the firm's out-of-pocket costs, then the company would find it easy to expand it's services.

Innovative Program Features

There are a multitude of features that made the program at Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corporation Limited a unique service. Confidentiality was mentioned as being a key factor in the success of the program. When small crew meetings were held to promote the program, with both union and staff representatives, no-one was signing up. It was then decided that a workplace representative would initiate a confidential phone call with any employee who indicated a preliminary interest during the promotional presentations. This way no-one else in a crew knew whether or not a person was in the basic skills program. This process proved successful.

Promotion was also an innovative program feature. Presentations were made in small groups, to approximately 1,000 people over three to four months. The program was well explained, so that people knew exactly what they were getting into. It was always presented by union and staff representatives together.

The flexible structure of the program was also an innovative feature.

The trainer would interview candidates for the program and after completing an initial assessment would then schedule them in at their own skill level. This process helped create a comfortable, non-threatening environment in which people could learn at their own pace. It also assured the trainees' confidentiality because no-one knew the details of another person's literacy level. This helped to avoid intimidation for those working at lower levels. The instructor was also mentioned as a key player in the program's success. He was a peer of the employees, trusted by the participants and credible with the union representatives.

A partnership between union and management was also considered a key feature in the program.

A very committed individual from management helped create a high profile for the program which contributed to its promotion.

Advice to Others Planning a Similar Program

Some of the advice that the participants gave to others setting up a program can be summarized by the following statements:

- present the program to the whole workforce - "communication" is key to successful program implementation.
- confidentiality is important so that no one is singled out. This concept must be maintained throughout the program.
- initiate working at your own pace.
- encourage self-motivation.
- the program must be supported by both union and management.

Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm Region

Basic Education for Skills Training Program

Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm

Basic Education for Skills Training Program

Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm is primarily a research organization, whose main objective is to generate and transfer technologies aimed at improving food production in Canada. Farm labourers raise dairy cattle, swine and poultry, as well as plant and harvest crops such as corn and soybean. This is all done under the direction of research scientists.

Although there is a fairly stable workforce in Agriculture Canada, there has been significant downsizing in all occupational categories, with a shift to more contract positions. Labourers have been with the Central Experimental Farm for up to thirty years.

Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST), which began in 1988, is the Ontario Federation of Labour's workplace literacy program. The program seeks to address the needs of the worker as a "whole person". For example, their philosophy posits that although securing the skills to carry out work related tasks are mandatory, so are the skills related to home, the union and the community.

With the BEST program, instructors and participants come from the same workplace and union. Selected co-worker instructors receive an intensive training course in English or French given by the Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST staff. Employees volunteer to instruct during working hours and teach reading, writing, mathematics and communications.

The workplace program at the Central Experimental Farm was designed to meet the needs of labourers as whole individuals and assist them in upgrading their workplace skills. There have also been significant increases in the ability of the participants to read, write, communicate, problem solve and compute. The introduction of the metric system was also a highly successful component of the program. Time savings through recycling, an increase in productivity and individuals being able to work more independently (while being part of a team) are some of the other positive program impacts.

Creative problem solving was used to resolve difficulties during the implementation of the Farm's BEST program. It was the responsibility of the steering committee to work out issues around scheduling, location and logistics. The support of senior management aided in resolving difficulties raised in response to time costs and productivity.

One of the most innovative features of the Farm's workplace education program is it's bilingual nature. Francophones, who represent a minority group in the context of this Farm Program are in danger of losing their French literacy skills through assimilation. BEST allows both anglophones and francophones at the Central Experimental Farm the opportunity to improve their skills with pride and dignity.

The Central Experimental Farm offers the following advice to others planning to implement a similar program: network with others who have experience in workplace literacy programs, consult with anyone involved in the setting up and running of the program, strike a steering committee, promote the need for workplace education, secure worker or union representation, demonstrate ongoing communication at all times, make the program voluntary and lastly, maintain ongoing support, training, trouble shooting, planning, negotiating, celebrating and evaluating.

Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm Region

Basic Education for Skills Training Program

Company Background

The Central Experimental Farm within Agriculture Canada is primarily a research organization. The main objective of the Central Experimental Farm's Research Branch is to generate and transfer technologies aimed at improving the sustainability and competitiveness of agro-ecological systems, beneficial biological processes related to the agri-food sector and plant and animal productivity, quality and safety. The organization cherishes both a positive and productive work environment and thus encourages adherence to work values such as respect for others, co-operative teamwork, open communication, commitment to the organization and the recognition of achievement.

The Central Experimental Farm Region, which is the focus of this case study is comprised of two sites: the Greenbelt Farm, the location of the Centre for Food and Animal Research (CFAR) and the Central Experimental Farm, the location of the Plant Research Centre (PRC). Approximately 850 people are employed between the two locations and include research scientists, technical and administration staff and farm labourers. The culturally diverse workforce is comprised of full time, part time and term employees with an age range of 20 to 75.

Dedicated to improving food production in Canada, the CEF is a working farm. Under the direction of the research scientists, farm labourers raise dairy cattle, swine and poultry. They plant and harvest various crops such as corn and soybeans that are the basis of the scientific experiments ultimately aimed at improving agricultural practices.

Human Resources Policy

There has been significant downsizing in Agriculture Canada in all occupational categories with a shift to more contract positions.

Within occupations, management personnel tends to move around more frequently, while clerical and administrative support staff stay anywhere from five to ten years.

Labourers have been with the Central Experimental Farm for up to thirty years. There is some yearly turnover due to the hiring of term employees.

Recruiting and hiring are conducted by top managers, the Human Resources Department and by supervisors. Usually jobs are filled internally with the exception of senior management and specific scientific-related positions. The career ladder is defined by the "merit principle" and progress occurs through competition boards and by job re-classification. The organization offers a wide range of benefits including health, life and disability insurance, pensions, vacation, parental leave and tuition reimbursement.

There exists a group of skilled workers who are currently ready for advancement, as well as a pool of employees whose skills are seen as too low to make them promotable. There has been very little mobility at the CEF and within the federal government generally within recent years, especially at the lower levels.

Opportunities are available for on-the-job training, tuition assistance, paid release time for off-site training or education and in-house seminars. As in many workplaces, training opportunities have generally been offered to professional and technical employees, with less opportunity or encouragement for training within the labour sector. The labourer sector has received pesticide and safety training.

Program Description

The workplace program at the Central Experimental Farm Region is the Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST (Basic Education for Skills Training) Program. BEST, which began in 1988, is offered through the auspices of the local union with support from management. Most of the labourer, clerical and some technical employees at the CEF are represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Local 70075. BEST is offered free of charge in English and French.

At the Farm, BEST is administered by a steering committee which was struck eight months prior to the BEST program starting up. The committee is comprised of top management, a human resource manager, a union representative and the BEST Regional Co-ordinator.

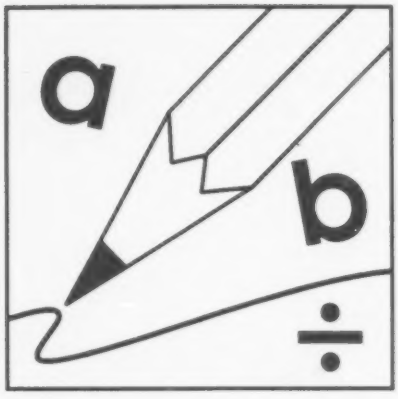
There is ongoing communication between the steering committee, the BEST Regional Co-ordinator, the instructors and the participants of the program.

At the time of writing, the BEST program had been in place at the Central Experimental Farm Region for almost one year.

BEST seeks to address the needs of the worker as a "whole person". Having the skills to carry out work-related tasks are important but so are skills related to home, the union and the community. Management wanted employees to acquire the necessary tools that would enable them to be as marketable as possible. The program is learner-centred and adjusts to the particular needs of each group of participants. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a BEST certificate at a graduation ceremony.

Services and Training Delivered

With the BEST Program, instructors and participants come from the same workplace and union. At the Central Experimental Farm Region, employees volunteer to instruct during working hours. Selected co-worker instructors receive an

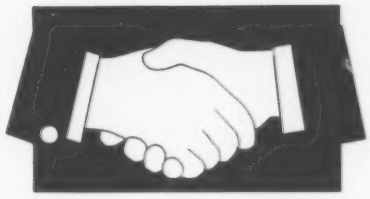


intensive training course in English or French given by the Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST staff. Participation in BEST is voluntary. The classes takes place in small groups, with the emphasis on creating a positive learning environment.

Currently four classes are being run at the CEF- three in English and one in French. Three classes are delivered at the Greenbelt location and one at the Central Experimental Farm. Classes, composed of five to ten participants, are conducted during the work day, on the work site and on the Farm's time. They are given in either two two hour sessions a week or a one four hour block once a week. The duration of the course is 37 weeks.

Reading, writing, mathematics and communications are the focus of the workplace education program with attention paid to work related issues and demands, personal development and the transfer of skills. The metric system was introduced as part of the curriculum and was warmly received by the participants. There are 25 people enrolled in the program which is voluntary and from the labourer sector of the Farm.

As the program is in its first year, management anticipate similar numbers for the next year with some new participants joining the program. Some graduates will choose to move on while others



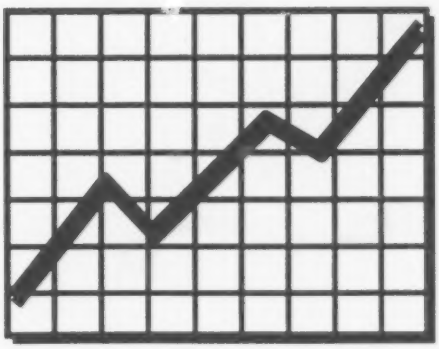
might feel that they could benefit from another year of BEST training. Between the four classes there are 23 men and two women, with the high proportion of men reflecting the composition of the workforce. The age range is from twenty-five to sixty, with years of service ranging from four to twenty years. Participants are all Caucasian with educational backgrounds ranging from below grade 8 to college level. In terms of cost, BEST absorbs the cost of instructor training, materials and staff support. Costs to the Farm are reflected chiefly in time expenditure with start up and operating costs absorbed by the Director General of the Central Experimental Farm.

Decision Making about the Program

The Human Resources Department liked the BEST Program model and initiated contact with the BEST Regional Co-ordinator for Eastern Ontario, who became part of the steering committee and acted as chief liaison between the committee, the instructors and the participants. It was strongly supported from the outset by senior management, the union and by some supervisors.

A co-operative problem-solving approach was applied to assist in the development of the program.

The BEST Co-ordinator played a major role in getting the program organized and off to a



productive start. This individual spoke with managers, supervisors and employees about their goals for the program. The BEST Co-ordinator selected and trained the instructors, held information sessions for all interested employees, was responsible for individual needs assessments and where appropriate made referrals to other programs. The BEST Co-ordinator assisted with the design of the program and curriculum development and was involved with on-going program implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Class visits took place and reports were issued on the progress of the BEST Program at the Central Experimental Farm Region.

Although a few managers and supervisors were initially sceptical about the program and arguments were made in terms of practicality, release time and cost, the program was strongly supported by senior management, the union and by most supervisors who viewed it as a good idea and a solid expenditure of time.

Program Impacts

The workplace education program at the Central Experimental Farm Region was not aimed at Grade 12 creditation. It was designed to meet the needs of the labourers as whole individuals and assist them in upgrading their skills. If an employee wished to obtain a Grade 12 Secondary School Diploma he or she would be appropriately resourced on an individual basis. The program achieved a 90-100% completion rate with criteria for successful completion based on attendance, participation and the meeting of individual goals.

Although the program has not directly affected hiring or recruiting strategies and wage structures, individuals are now more confident in applying for other internal jobs with a few receiving acting positions and promotions as a result of the BEST Program.

There have been significant increases in the ability of the participants to read, write, communicate, problem solve and compute. The introduction of the metric system achieved good success. There have been time savings through recycling, productivity has increased, individuals are able to work more independently and as part of a team, confidence has risen with supervisors and shyness has been replaced with more outgoingness. Participants felt they were more able to ask questions, use machinery and perform any technical tasks required.

As some participants have stated when visited by two members of the steering committee, "I write

memos when I'm acting for my supervisor", "I applied for a job and made it to the interview", "I understand metric now... it's really important for my job", "I have more confidence talking to people", "I stand up for myself", BEST works like a team, like work should be", "I feel okay about trying new things".

Evaluation of the program is ongoing. Instructors and participants set and revise goals and evaluate their progress toward these goals on a regular basis. Class visits are conducted by members of the steering committee and reports compiled on the progress of the program. Participants have had the opportunity to express their views about the program in terms of new skills acquired, personal development, impact on work related issues and feed-back to instructors. Monthly reports are kept by instructors.

Barriers to Implementation

During the planning phase of the Farm's workplace education program, a problem solving approach was applied to issues around location,

practically and start up costs. Issues around scheduling, location and logistics were worked out by the Steering Committee.

Even though some levels of management raised concerns around time costs and productivity levels, senior management supported the program which aided greatly in its inception and implementation.

Policy Influences

Funding was not a major obstacle facing the Central Experimental Farm Region's workplace education program. However, one factor which would strongly influence the Farm's decision to train workers with low competencies to levels needed for certification would be the introduction of tests developed by schools. Top management

supported the idea of tests to certify that workers have the basic skills required for the workplace.

Other policies which might positively impact the implementation and expansion of a workplace education program would be if the course work was more job-integrated. Regardless of any policy changes, the Central Experimental Farm Region plans to continue the BEST Program next year.

Innovative Features of the Program

There are many innovative features in the Farm's workplace education program.

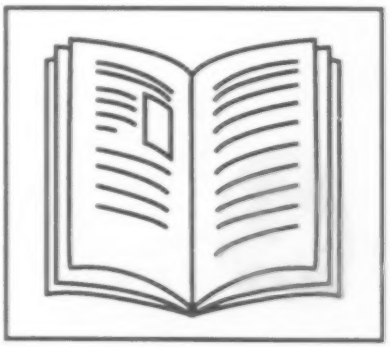
A significant aspect of BEST is the bilingual nature of the program.

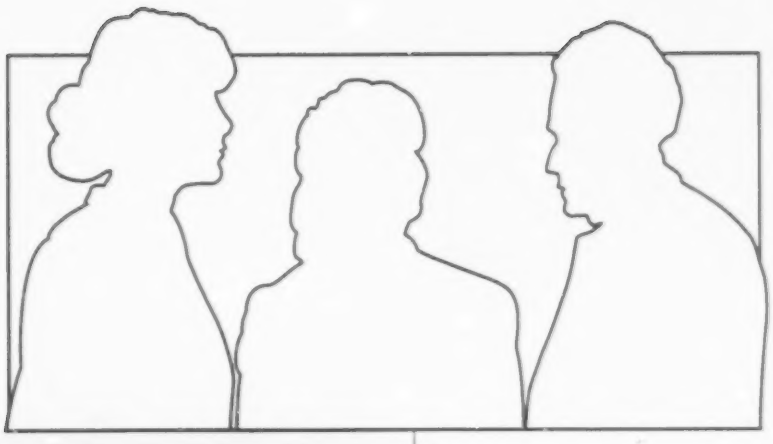
Particularly for francophones, who represent a minority language group in the context of this Farm Program and who often work in English, there is the danger of losing their French literacy skills through assimilation. BEST allows both anglophones and francophones at the Farm the opportunity to improve their skills with pride and dignity. There is enthusiasm and constant feedback generated by the instructors and an ever growing feeling of self confidence, friendship and trust amongst the participants.

The establishment, support and dedication of a steering committee coupled with the support of

senior management allowed the principles of flexibility, commitment, effective communication, problem solving and compassion to be promoted.

The use of co-workers as the "instructor model" exemplified the practice of "no distinction", with people viewed as equal partners in the learning process. Another important feature of the program was the series of information sessions where all interested individuals could attend without feeling singled out. Additional features included an appropriate selection process, the input of employees in the design of the program which was work and life related and 100% on work time and the avoidance of negative terms like "literate" and "illiterate".





Advice to Others Planning A Similar Program

In planning a workplace education program, the Central Experimental Farm Region offers the following advice:

- Take the first step and "do it" as it leads to increased morale and increased confidence.
- Talk to other managers who have initiated such a program.
- Encourage supervisors to visit other establishments that have workplace education programs.
- Consult with all the people involved in the set-up and running of such a program -the union, managers, supervisors, participants, instructors and educational consultants.
- Strike a steering committee at the outset of the program with representation from the significant stakeholders.
- Make others aware that workplace education programs are needed. Don't just adhere to the idea that the results of this kind of training belong just to the "sponsoring" organization.
- Secure union representation. If there is no union, have worker representation.
- Encourage training during work hours.
- Have managers fully committed to the process.
- Demonstrate ongoing open communication at all times to all levels.
- Ensure the content of the program speaks to the needs of the people and is generated in part from the participants.
- Hold groups no larger than 10.
- Maintain ongoing support, training, trouble shooting, planning, negotiating, celebrating and evaluating.
- Try a co-worker model of instruction with appropriate training and support for instructor at all times.
- Make the program voluntary.
- Don't give up.

Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm Region

EPILOGUE

Written by Tamara Levine
BEST Regional Coordinator

The information for the case study on the workplace education program at the Central Experimental Farm was gathered during January and February 1995. At the end of February, 1995, the Federal Government passed its annual budget. The budget contained many "deficit-cutting measures", including drastic cuts to programs and unprecedented cuts in federal public service jobs. It was announced that 45,000 jobs would be eliminated across Canada, 15,000 of them in the National Capital Region. Several departments were targeted in particular for the cuts. Agriculture Canada was named as one of the "Most Affected" departments.

BEST in general and BEST at the Farm in particular reflects, by definition, the state of the workplace and union within which it delivers. There is no question that the impact of the budget on BEST at the Farm had repercussions that no one could have predicted in the months leading up to the budget. For example, the BEST graduation was initially scheduled to take place in early March. It was postponed because the impact of the budget was so severe. By mid-March, the Director of the CEF had been moved in to a new job with no further responsibility for the program. The second date for the graduation at the end of March was cancelled. By the time the graduation finally took place in mid-April, word was out that the Centre for Food and Animal Research at the Greenbelt would be closing permanently. Even though the final closure would not take place for two years, BEST was cancelled at CFAR. The two remaining BEST programs at the CEF, an English and a French program at the Plant Research Centre, ran for one month and had to be temporarily suspended because of increased work demands and less people to do the work. These two programs are slated to resume in the fall. By May, all of the CEF representatives on the BEST steering committee had moved to other jobs except one. The stress level for employees at all levels has been extremely high as everyone perceives their job to be vulnerable. The farm labourers in particular have less education and marketable skills and are feeling under considerable pressure.

The hope is that employees at the Farm were able to gain and in some cases will continue to gain, some skills and confidence that will be helpful to them in the next step in their lives.

What Lessons can be Learned to Inform our Practice

In an attempt to explain why these programs worked, a content analysis using a constant comparative technique was used on the information collected from over 100 interviews. This type of approach is commonly used when trying to understand a quality or phenomenon such as program innovativeness or barriers to program implementation. In the following section each factor and its importance to improving the field of practice is discussed.

What makes a workplace program innovative?

Looking over the 10 programs there are some definite program features common to all case studies. Such components as program flexibility, a committed management, a co-operative team, quality instructors, a positive psychological classroom environment and an employee centred program focus together create an initiative that works and is effective for all participants involved.

Program Flexibility

Flexibility within a basic skills program means that employees have options. An innovative program allows trainees to attend classes before and after a shift. This means that both classroom hours and the available site are accessible to the participants. Another aspect of flexibility concerns the teacher-learner interaction. Teaching styles must reflect the learning styles of the trainees. Risk taking behaviors are encouraged in a flexible program. Often learners would help out others, both in the classroom and on the shop floor as a result of trying out these new work behaviors. This sharing and team approach was first practiced in the flexible classroom culture.

A Committed Management

Commitment from senior management of the company to support the continuous learning was key to all of the programs previously discussed. Along with creating a culture that encourages learning, designating funds for basic skills training is also an essential activity. Many of the programs mentioned that there were times when the corporation had to make very difficult choices to ensure that program funding continued, even in periods of downsizing or lay-offs. The idea of a committed management to a trained and up-dated workforce is an important feature of an innovative program. One of the returns of this investment seems to be a quality staff with a high degree of company morale.

A Co-operative Team

It is not enough that management alone be committed to the program. It is also necessary for a commitment from all program stakeholders. This includes all levels of workers, the union, and those within and outside of the system. When this occurs each stakeholder has a feeling of program ownership. This makes it easier to advocate and provide a safety net of support.

All parties need to become co-operative partners in the learning process. The commitment to a strong partnership throughout the infrastructure

of a company contributes to the type of co-operation and support needed for an innovative program. This cohesiveness assists in the development of the program especially in being responsive to the identified needs of the workers. A program established, operated, funded, and supported through a cooperative effort of staff management, labour, and government has a lasting impact.

Quality Instructors

Capable instructors were often mentioned as an innovative program feature. Caring personalities, along with their dedication and hard work, not only contributed to making successful programs but also resulted in employees believing in themselves and their own abilities. Relaxed, approachable instructors coupled with quality learning resources were often described as key program features.

A Positive Psychological Classroom Environment

Another group of factors closely related to program innovativeness could be described as the creation of a positive psychological classroom environment. For example, being able to work at your own pace, one-to-one support tutorials and an absence of pressure for course work deadlines and tests helped to create an environment of co-operativeness rather than competitiveness among the trainees. Confidentiality was also mentioned as being key to the comfort level of participants.

Most trainees enjoyed working together in a situation other than work. This social dimension contributed to the development of a positive group culture, which in turn, provided an environment for both personal and professional growth. This feeling of pride was often transfered back to the shop floor and gave employees a stronger sense of job satisfaction.

Another spin off to the positive climate created in the classroom was the effect it had on an employee's personal life. For example, employees experienced sentiments such as "no longer feeling stupid", or being able to "help their children reading their homework", or "believing in themselves". A learning environment which can facilitate these kinds of dynamics is a powerful component to an innovative program.

Employee-Centred Program Focus

Identifying and responding to the needs of all employees results in an employee centred program. Both workplace and individual needs assessments were considered paramount to the success of all of the programs. These assessments not only guided in the development of the program but pointed towards the direction in the delivery of the services. Employee input was actively encouraged in most aspects of the decision making process. This type of focus also encouraged feelings of ownership, as well as a willingness to help co-workers. Groups became closely knit, and mutually supportive — key characteristics of an innovative program.

What Were the Common Barriers Experienced in the Workplace Programs?

For any workplace education program to fully reach its operational state, barriers must be identified and appropriately resolved. In the previously presented case studies several barriers were consistently raised. Barriers such as program costs, location, unexpected delays, lack of infrastructure, difficulty enrolling the first students and company apprehension.

Program Costs

The cost of designing and implementing a workplace education program particularly with regards to release time was frequently mentioned as a barrier that needed to be addressed. As well, expenses related to conducting the needs assessments were also a concern. Labour costs due to loss of employees' time during training and the logistical problems of allowing workers to leave their shifts were also considered initial start up problems. Some of the ways that these programs solved these problems are highlighted in the next section.

Location

Location of the actual program site was stated as an issue needing to be resolved in many of the programs. Some difficulties arose due to the remote nature of the classroom site, or the inconvenient site location. There were also concerns raised over the lack of privacy attached to certain sites. Confidentiality was extremely important to the participants. Workers were often afraid to reveal their literacy difficulties, or were embarrassed and sometimes questioned whether they truly needed these particular skills for their jobs. This type of apprehension greatly impacts the recruitment of potential participants for a program.

Unexpected Delays

Due to the novel nature of designing and implementing a workplace education program in all of the companies discussed, unexpected delays are inevitable. Although there is no one formula for resolving these delays, being aware of them may assist the program planning committee. Some of the most commonly stated reasons for unexpected delays were: lack of information available to arrange for basic skills training, communication difficulties, worker resistance to the training and therefore difficulty enrolling the first students, confusing program expectations, mismatches between workers' needs and available training and getting resource materials on time.

Lack of Infrastructure

The question of whether companies had the infrastructure to adequately address the problem of workplace literacy was one that resulted in many discussions. In most cases, structural adaptations took time to plan and were in constant review. Early discussions seemed to focus on how many workers would be allowed to participate in the training. This meant that the feasibility of allowing workers to leave their shifts, particularly if their jobs took them out of town, or if they

worked irregular hours, or if they were part of a required team were all circumstances that had to be carefully thought through. A lot of good will on the part of management enabled these new structures to be tested.

Difficulty Enrolling the First Students

Many of the program participants in the case studies identified difficulties enrolling the first students. This type of barrier often contributed to a slow beginning. The trainees were not only unsure of what they would be getting from basic skills training, but at times needed to come to terms with time release problems, family conflicts and, most importantly "the embarrassment of revealing that they had a literacy-related problem". Capable project team members sensitive to these concerns were able to weather such hurdles.

Company Apprehension

By trying to integrate a workplace basic skills program into the existing training services, companies often were unsure as to what to expect. Both employers and employees didn't really know what they would be getting from the program, and whether or not it would be effective. Other company apprehensions were the perceptions that workers would be resistant to basic skills remediation, and the actual matching of worker needs with available training. Some of these early apprehensions were also due to their lack of not knowing "how to" design a program. Connected to this was the inability of conducting a needs assessment.

What Advice Can Be Given to Others Planning to Implement a Program?

The following summarizes some of the valuable advice that the participants of the programs have to offer others interested in starting up their own program. This advice is categorized into the following factors: access available community resources, partnership funding, make the program voluntary, complete a needs assessment, and develop a multi-level planning committee.

Access Available Community Resources

Community resources and expertise can help jump-start a workplace education project. These local or national information networks are current and possess a multitude of skills and creative ideas. For example, the University of British Columbia language program and the Newfoundland Hydro LIFT program contacted ABC Canada to find out how to get started and what steps to follow to involve workers in the decision making process. As well provincial associations like Literacy B.C. and Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM) are also equipped to provide advice and information to employers. In the case of the Atlas Graham Industries program, it was WEM that assisted the company in it's needs assessment and curriculum material. It's these types of services, funded directly by the National Literacy Secretariat, that facilitate the access of valuable advice.

Partnership Funding

A clear message that was given by program participants was to seek out different levels and types of financial support for the program. This factor works in harmony with a sound foundation of information obtained from the community resources network. At one end of the continuum, there are programs where management sponsor their own initiatives, programs like Intertape Polymer Inc.. Another type of funding support can be found in training services like Saskatchewan's WEST program and Ontario's BEST program. Through partnership grants provided by the National Literacy Secretariat, these programs have developed curriculum materials, promotional information and facilitator training for their different provincial projects. In a similar vein, programs like the Calgary Herald, Northwoodcare, and Brunswick Smelting have used the services and expertise of their provincial Literacy Offices. These kinds of enabling arrangements are made possible through a federal-provincial funding mechanism initiated by the National Literacy Secretariat. In two of the case studies — Alberta Roofing Contractors Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro — direct funding has been provided by the National Literacy Secretariat as these projects develop innovative models of workplace literacy delivery.

Make the Program Voluntary

"Do not assume that the employees identified as candidates will come forward", and "do not coerce employees into participating in a workplace literacy program" were two pieces of advice that were repeatedly echoed throughout the various workplace education programs. Finding out how to get people to participate is key to planning a successful program. Advertising the program as a voluntary, self-paced program so that employees of all educational levels feel welcome assists in both the marketing and recruitment of participants. Ensuring confidentiality was another definite theme consistently mentioned.

Complete a Needs Assessment

Conducting a needs assessment to determine the appropriate training needs is a key step to implementing a program. Taking the time to think out the program design which is based on the information from a needs assessment has it's returns in the long run. It's important for a program committee to realize that this may be the last chance for some employees to have an opportunity for training. In other words, the training has to be meaningful for both the employee and the employer.

Develop a Multi-Level Planning Committee

Identifying a "champion" in the company to advocate for the program is a good first step followed by a well represented planning committee. By establishing a committee at the beginning, it is possible to both identify goals and the means for evaluation. This assists the company to build a partnership and strengthen "in-house" communication. As one respondent commented "communication among all the partners is key to a successful program." As was the case in several of the programs discussed, a joint multi-level planning committee reviewed components such as a flexible work space, class time and content scheduling problems on a regular basis.

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